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# THE KEY TO THE CASA

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*by*

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"BEHIND THE DEVIL SCREEN"

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*To*

IVES WASHBURN

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But there was one river especially . . .
resembling an immense snake uncoiled,
with its head in the sea, its tail lost in
the depths of the land . . .

JOSEPH CONRAD

# THE KEY TO THE CASA

## CHAPTER I

AT last his feet and his key were off the soil of China! If they had followed him here—to Manila—at least he would have a chance, but in China there had been nothing but disaster! He looked about dizzily. There was the long, two-storied plaster building rising flush from the street, and lifting discolored, pinkish walls to the red tiled roof—the Hotel Mindora. It was only a second-class Spanish hotel in the old Walled City of the Illustrados. Its upper story overhung the street, its pointed Gothic lantern swung above an arched doorway, and its narrow, deepset windows looked secretive. It was shabby, furtive, but the Japanese captain said it was respectable and the food was good. So it might do for a refuge.

He took off his cap and wiped his forehead. He had been seasick, and he was tired. All the way across the Yellow Sea the *Nako Maru* had tossed and pitched in the storm; and all the way across the Yellow Sea the thought of Mayhew and Ten Yen had pursued him as the whine of the distant typhoon pursued the freighter. If they had followed him, they must have caught the liner which left

Kowloon two hours after his boat sailed—they *might* be here now!

He glanced around the narrow street—so odd—so foreign. It was like a little street in Spain. Low stone houses lined it, their sagging balconies almost meeting, their windows, deep, confidential, protected by heavy iron bars. Sifting in and out through dark doorways slipped narrow-hipped, long-skirted tiny brown women; half-naked children; and Filipinos with gauzy shirts outside their trousers. A constant shuffle and clack rose like an undertone; little two-wheeled carriages drawn by sweating ponies darted past him.

Heat! It rose from the earth, it glared in the long rays of the sun, it pressed on his brain with maddening persistence! His clothes were plastered to him! He must get out of this brilliant blinding light that was flung back by the white walls of the houses. He picked up his bag, and crossed the cobbled street to the Hotel Mindora.

The long tiled lobby had half a dozen palms in tubs, and a hanging chandelier made of shell. It was full of the strong odor of cooking. At the desk a light brown, shifty-eyed mestizo looked him over.

"Yes—we have a room. The señor wishes the best?"

The señor did. The señor also felt an instant dislike of the sly eyes and too full lips of this mestizo. Greed and cunning were written on his face. He clapped his hands and a half-naked, smiling boy ran to pick up Neil Winton's bag.

"Si–señor—I take—"

The boy led him up wide stone steps and down a long corridor lined with windows on one side, that overlooked the patio. Above the fresh green of the trees he could see a miraculous sunset flowing over Mariveles, but in his room, shadows were already gathering in the corners.

It was as bare as a monk's cell. A big Spanish bed glimmered in ghostly lines beneath its close drawn net. How the devil could one sleep under it! It must be stifling! The whitewashed walls stretched only part way up to the extraordinarily high ceilings. They ended in open wooden gratings which went all around the room. He peered up at them. They let in the air—but, by George!—they also let in the sound of quarreling voices on the other side. He hoped they wouldn't keep *that* up all night.

In one corner was a washstand, with a bowl and pitcher. Above it, on the wall, was a cheap, highly colored picture of the Virgin; a hard Spanish chair stood by the window. It was the strangest hotel room Neil had ever seen.

After he had washed and shaved and put on fresh clothes he glanced at his watch. Seven o'clock! Slipping it into his pocket his fingers touched the box. The box! The key! Instantly his thoughts flew back to Kowloon! That infernal rickshaw coolie had recognized him! As the *Nako Maru* drew away from the docks in the misty Chinese dawn, Neil had seen the recognition in his face. And that was ominous! His pulse beat a little faster. If the coolie reported him to Ten Yen! And of course—the coolie would. He'd been turning it over and

over in his mind, but it always came back to the same thing—of course, the coolie would!

Locking his bag, he hurried to the long balcony above the patio where a dozen tables were set. It reminded him vaguely of the old Spanish homes in Monterey.

He never forgot that first dinner in the tropics A strange native melon; chicken fried in hot sauce; a rose-pink vegetable that looked and tasted like potato, but was not; papaya with a piquant sauce for salad; fresh coconut over ice cream; and hot coffee that was delicious. The languid guests were all Spaniards. They ate slowly, smoked constantly, stared at his knickerbocker suit, his very red hair, his fresh skin, commenting audibly in rapid Spanish. He stared back at them. The men were dressed in white, the women wore thin vivid frocks. He thought that, on the whole, they were a seedy looking lot.

There was nothing to interest him here. After he had finished his dinner he went back to his room. He had things to plan—to think out— In his bag was a map of the Walled City; for a long time he studied it under the glaring electric bulb that hung by a cord in the center of the room. The Pasig! Old Fort Santiago! The bridges—the gates—the names of the streets! He must know them all. The air was murky, stifling. Next door the quarreling couple had dined and returned, for he heard a woman's whimper. And from the street came the clack-clack of high-heeled shoes. Snapping out the light he went to the deep, embrasured window.

Outside there was a balcony formed by heavy, curved iron bars. He stepped down on it, and lit a cigarette. Looking up, he saw a vast velvet sky where the moon was rising. Bells, a multitude of bells were ringing! He felt restless, nervous, excited! His cigarette had no sedative effect. All around him was a new world, new scents, new air. The voices of the quarreling couple grew louder—they were quite shameless, these Spaniards. The damp Island air fanned his face. The confounded bells still pulsed. He shook himself impatiently. Again his thoughts shot back to Kowloon! Mayhew had said:

"The *Che Kiang* is halfway to Manila now—and she can't land without the key!"

Neil wondered how close the *Che Kiang* was to Manila? Of course, she couldn't land. He had the key! He stood there for a long moment, thinking hard. Then above the confused clatter of the streets sounded the shrill whistle of a river boat! The Pasig! Pasig—where boats from Singapore, and Saigon, Zamboanga, and the South China seas tied up. He might find out something about the *Che Kiang* down on the Pasig. It was worth trying. He caught up his cap and hurried out.

In the doorway of the Mindora Hotel he hesitated — In which direction lay the Pasig? All about him were little shops, wide open, dimly lit. Filipinos lounged and chattered together in the barred windows. Chinamen in shapeless blue trousers sat on the sidewalk smoking long pipes. Small ponies, driven by knotty brown men, tore past him with a

great rattling of nickel harness. The Walled City was cooling itself frankly. All about him was Spain in Asia.

Three or four squares away loomed the dark bulk of the wall. He turned down another narrow street. Suddenly a lamp flared above him, and the casement, made of little transparent blocks of shell opened sharply. "Chiquita!" called a Spanish voice. He looked up and saw a girl with bare shoulders, straight black hair, opaque eyes, and the red lips of the half-caste standing there. Her dark eyes smiled—a little. Neil smiled—a little—too, but he walked on. This street had a dramatic Latin flavor.

At last he found a gate in the wall. When he passed through it he was close to the river. Flagstones led to the water chuckling and laughing against the sides of straw-hooded bancas. The air was heavy, damp, filled with the odor of growing things, along with the acrid smell of dust. The Pasig was full of huddled, swarming native life. Row after row of narrow bancas were lashed together, and from their curved matting roofs he heard the continuous murmur of voices. The terrific fecundity of Malay life slumbering here in the hot night startled him. He glanced from the white bridge at the upper end of the Walled City to the old Spanish tower guarding Fort Santiago, at the entrance to the bay. After all—the Pasig was a long and tortuous river, and Manila a port of call for boats of many nations. He saw a sudden movement on a launch close to him—on the left. A Chinaman, squatting on the

rail and smoking his long pipe, watched him. He had an eye on the weather also—for every now and then his glance searched the sky.

"Rain?—What you think?" said Neil, making conversation.

The Chinaman stood up; looked at the moon; stared at the river speculatively; and examined Neil in friendly fashion.

"Mebbie! Heapie damn hot!"

He was squat, square, his eyes had little crinkles about them and he was dressed in the semblance of a uniform with a brass button or two that glittered in the brilliant moonlight. But his broad Chinese face was like every other broad Chinese face Neil had seen.

"Many Chinese boats in? *Che Kiang* in?" asked Neil, casually.

It was the wrong question! Yet it was not the Chinaman's body, for that swayed easily with the light roll of the boat; nor his hands, they still fingered the long pipe; but the sudden gleam in the Chinese eyes that told Neil he had asked the wrong question. Even in the pale light he could see them change—grow watchful—he had the swift impression of a cat about to spring. Then the Chinese face grinned indifferently.

"Think 'em stlange boat—not know—" he said.

"Maskie"— Neil lit a cigarette.—"Good night" —the Chinaman waved his pipe, and Neil walked away. Of course, he might be mistaken. Possibly the moonlight or his uncertain nerves had played tricks with his imagination. He walked along the river

front beside the wall, and toward Fort Santiago with its projecting towers.

Clouds were rolling up from the bay. The fresh odor of rain was in the air. It might be wise to get in before the storm broke. He hurried toward the gate, entirely unconscious that a tall man in white, strolling and smoking on top of the wall almost directly above his head, had suddenly stopped to peer down at him. Then this tall figure uttered a startled exclamation—he threw away his cigarette and raced pell-mell down the crumbling inner runway which ended in the gate Neil was just then entering. There was a warning shout— "I say—look out down there!" Neil felt danger, swift, imminent —in the surrounding blackness! He heard heavy breathing; fingers clutched his coat, something leaped—then descended! Something that flashed, and ripped his coat sleeve, and bit into his arm! Furious, he wheeled, trying to grapple with it! It was like grappling with an eel! His frantic fingers opened—clutched—closed on—nothing! Over his shoulder he could see a dim figure that was doubling, turning, running like a wild animal down to the river.

"I say—that was a near thing!" The voice was British.

Holding his arm, with little warm drops of blood trickling into his palm, Neil looked up. He saw a tall man in white, there in the dark.

"Was that you—shouting?" he asked him. "He got me all right!"

"I was on top of the wall." The Englishman was

drawing Neil out of the gateway into the cobbled street and under the Spanish lantern—he looked him over.

"Here—let me see! We'll get your coat off! Does it hurt much?"

Neil didn't know. It stung but he felt dazed, uncertain. He pulled off his coat and rolled up his shirt sleeve. They saw a nasty cut—not long, but deep. It throbbed viciously! The Englishman examined it.

"H-mm—it will need stitches. You must have it treated at once. Infection is bad here in the tropics. I suppose you have a white doctor?" He was talking rapidly. "Wait—don't do that! I have a clean handkerchief." Shaking it out, he began to bind it around Neil's arm. Thoroughly shaken and confused, Neil stared up at this tall, friendly man in white evening clothes.

"I missed him! I tried to get him, but he was like an eel! I couldn't see his face—just heard him breathing! Damn it! Why couldn't I get him?" He had no idea, of course, how incoherent he sounded in the dark, but the Englishman nodded.

"I saw you speak to him—saw him follow you—knew he meant to get you in the dark gate—that's why I shouted. It was the Chinaman you spoke to—down by the river." He had made a workmanlike job of binding up the arm. "Better put your coat on—"

"The Chinaman—are you sure?" Neil was startled.

"Yes—did you say you knew a white doctor?"

"No—" Neil frowned and shook his head. "I don't know any one,—in Manila. I just got in from Kowloon. I'm at the Hotel Mindora."

"Oh?—The Hotel Mindora?" The British face was a study in conflicting emotions. "Well, wouldn't you like to see Dr. Norton? He's a friend of mine, here in the Walled City. I'll take you there. My name's Crewe, Cecil Crewe. I'm here temporarily in the Walled City myself." Neil had been so busy with his whirling thoughts that he had not really *seen* this man, only got dim impressions—a voice, a white figure in the dark—now he stared at him frankly.

He saw a tall blond man in a dinner jacket and trousers of white linen. His frame was big, but he had an air of fragility, as if sickness or trouble had worn him down. The old lantern threw yellow lights over his deep eyes, set under a broad white brow where the sandy hair was thinning. He had a clean-cut, firm, long English jaw, with sallow skin drawn tight over high cheek bones. Neil liked everything about him. He grasped Mr. Crewe's hand with a vigor that made him wince.

"Never would have turned if you hadn't shouted! Never! He'd have got me sure!"—another shake. "My name's Neil Winton."

Mr. Crewe smiled. "Have you any idea why the Chinaman followed you, Mr. Winton?"

"No—no, I haven't," but Neil was troubled.

"I don't believe I'd stay at the Mindora if I were you." Crewe was studying him thoughtfully.

"Why? I went there because the captain of the

boat said it was a pretty decent place. As good as any in the Walled City."

"It hasn't a very good reputation. It's native—half-caste. I'll meet you there in a few minutes and we'll go over to Dr. John's. I live just around the corner. I want to tell my sister where I am. If you happen to have some alcohol, soak that handkerchief in it." He smiled in a very friendly fashion and with a wave of the hand was gone.

But Neil walked back to the Mindora in a brown study. He was so deep in thought that he brushed past the few natives on the street without seeing them. Now what the devil did all this mean? Then a quick fear turned him cold! He stood still and thrust his hand deep into his pocket. But his key was safe! He could feel the sharp edges of the box. Had that Chinaman intended to steal it? Had he intended to murder him—there—in the dark gateway? But why should he—the thing was absurd! To kill a man because he asked a question about a boat called the *Che Kiang*. And yet—Neil remembered now, that even while he asked it—he had felt somehow that it was the wrong question.

It was beginning to rain. Swift clouds went scudding across the sky. The moon was obscured, and the wind was rising. It was probably only a tropic storm, but people were hurrying to shelter. His arm stung and throbbed! He pulled his cap down and raced along, trying to remember the streets with their mysterious and abrupt turnings. This was an eerie old city. Above him a window banged, and somewhere a clock struck nine. He

heard a calesa come rattling down the street, its driver scattering the pedestrians with his warning cry of "Tabí! Tabí!" He seemed in the very devil of a hurry!

The calesa came on at a spanking pace and raindrops glittered on its projecting black hood. Neil glanced at it casually, but the next instant with an oath of dismay he had leaped back into the shadows of a small arched doorway. He crouched there, peering out, waiting for it to pass. There was one moment, one breathless, dreadful moment, when the little vehicle seemed to hesitate as it swung directly in front of him, but the two men in it were talking, and looking straight ahead. He was quite certain they had not seen him. As the calesa rattled on over the cobbles, he stepped out cautiously and stared after it. His eyes narrowed to two points of light—his jaw set grimly—

For their boat *had* been faster than his freighter—

Those two were—Mayhew and Ten Yen!

## CHAPTER II

THE wet cobbles began to glisten in the light of the Spanish lantern set in the wall, but Cecil Crewe continued to stare up the dim deserted street where the American had disappeared. The warm tropical rain was wilting his white evening clothes; he paid no attention. He was deeply disturbed—deeply puzzled. Into the midst of his quiet evening smoke and stroll had come something disquieting; he wanted to think about it.

As he lit his cigarette, making a quick bowl of his hands against the wind, a calesa came rattling down the street, the cochero grunting and hissing at his tired pony. The two men in it, seeing a white shape looming in the rain, leaned out to look at him curiously. Cecil Crewe stared back at them. He saw a big man with a ruddy hard face and raking bold eyes. Beside him sat a Chinaman. In the flickering twin lights of the calesa, his ivory face, set on a twisted bird's neck, peered from under the big black hood. It was only a moment's passing—an etched indelible moment—then the calesa lurched on through the gate and down to the river leaving Cecil Crewe standing motionless, staring after it. There were not two Chinamen in the world who looked like that! He was sure of it! And although he had never seen this one before, he knew who he was. A mandarin of the coral button—supreme in the wide Providence of Tung-scha—Ten

Yen. His cigarette burned to a cold gray ash between his fingers.

But the next instant Cecil Crewe was running back through the misty black arch of the gate. Then he hesitated, pulling himself up short. The calesa, rocketing ahead over the flagstones, had halted close to the river. It looked as if something were about to happen, and Crewe drew back into the gloom of the gate. Hidden under its high protecting arch, he could see the wet flagstones and the huddled craft of the river. The big man who was with Ten Yen alighted, and stood in the rain talking to the Chinaman in the calesa. Keenly alert—Crewe peered out—watched—listened—and wondered what was going to take place. There was a launch moored beside native bancas and cascos—the same launch he had looked down on from the wall. But he didn't see the Chinese sailor. Ten Yen, surprisingly quick and vigorous, climbed out of the calesa and walked toward it, his black cloak fluttering around his tiny figure. Then somebody squatting in the boat suddenly stood upright—a square outline of a man etched against the fugitive lights of the river. It was the same sailor who had stabbed Winton in the gate! He reached out an arm to help Ten Yen aboard. Crewe's eyes stretched their widest. He leaned out as far as he dared from the gate. The cochero turned away; apparently the big man had given his final instructions, for he too stepped aboard the launch, and after a moment, although he couldn't see them, Crewe could hear the faint flow of their voices above the trickle and

gurgle of rain along the flagstones. Then the chug-chug of an engine startled the river. A second later the boat had nosed away from its berth, it was moving out into the middle of the sluggish stream; through the rain he could see the dim glow of its lights on the water, as it moved down the Pasig to the open bay. There was something furtive about that quiet embarcation, something singular about the boat itself, which lay so close to the water. For all its cumbersome appearance, it was made for speed, and it had slipped away into the night like a flying shadow. As long as he could see its silver streamline, Cecil Crewe stood in the black arch and watched it. He believed those two had finished whatever errand had taken them ashore.

Rain pounded inexorably! Rain! Rain! It swished against the old wall, it sharpened the smell of sewage from the river, it made the air heavy with a strange tropic sweetness. He stood there, thinking, conjecturing, openly dismayed. Then he turned and walked slowly back through the gate. It was easy to fathom the connection between the Mandarin and the Chinese sailor—but *how* had a decent chap like Neil Winton incurred the enmity of the venomous Ten Yen? By Jove—that pulled one up! His hair was soaking, his clothes limp, his boots sodden. He moved briskly down the street toward the old Delgarda Casa, which he had lately rented; it stood, a crouching black mass, on a corner not far from the ruins of Fort Santiago. Like all old houses in the Walled City, there was a cavernous opening in the middle that led directly beneath

the house to the patio. Under this long black arch he stopped to look around; sometimes his sister met him here. But the passage was empty. He hurried through it into the patio, which was a blurred mass of foliage swaying in the storm. Rain splashed in the fountain, trickled down the wide stone stairway that led to the upper living rooms, beat down on the mango tree lifting heavy branches against the high rear wall.

He walked swiftly along the wet paths, and up the dripping stairs. He was hunting Victory. She had a shrewd brain under her sleek yellow hair. She was more a playmate and a pal, than a sister. He counted a lot on Victory.

A wide balcony was protected by a deep overhanging roof. At the head of the stairs a swinging iron lamp picked out the pattern of dull red and ivory in the Spanish tiles, it intensified the colors of the lotus blossoms heaped in a Moro basket, it gleamed over the polished Toledo swords hanging beside the sala doors. Crewe paused there a moment to shake the rain from his clothes. Then he went into the huge and lofty room, heavy with musty tropical dampness. A long Spanish table in the center held tall candles in branching silver-gilt candelabra, and their yellow flames, moving with every stir of the wind, changed the cadena de amor in a big bowl to colors nature never intended. A lamp of opalescent shell glowed on inlaid Spanish furniture, on a native harp strung with hemp, on Delgarda portraits looking out of tarnished gold frames.

Victory was there, a pale graceful shape, smoking beside one of the long windows.

"Hillo!" she said lazily.

"Hello!" His voice was nervous, quick. "I say, Victory—something queer's happened—"

She sprang up and caught his coat.

"Wait, Cecil—turn around," running her fingers along the sleeve. "Wet! And why on earth are you so late? What's happened? But go and change first, then come back and tell me." She gave him a little push. "Hurry!"

He flicked a smile at her, and obeyed. One did things for Victory one didn't want to. In a few minutes he was back in dry clothes. He found her perched on the end of the long table, her left foot dangling, her right screwed up under her, her sleek little head shining in the candlelight.

"Well—?"

How like her that was! The drawl, one eye cocked whimsically at him, her cigarette poised at an angle, her vivid face smiling.

"I might as well tell you, I suppose." He smiled back—knowing he always told her—everything. Victory nodded, with a look of lively curiosity.

"You might as well, my dear."

"I intended to; I don't seem clear on it myself." He was frowning as he told her how he had strolled along the wall, smoking and watching the river life; what he had seen; how he had intercepted young Winton in the gateway; she listened, very intent.

"He's an American. Awfully decent chap; rather young."

"American— Oh!" Victory tilted a charming nose at that nation. "The Chinaman would have done for him, of course, if you hadn't been there—you saved his life—I fancy—"

"I wonder. He was game, nervy as the devil. Cursed because the Chinaman got away." Crewe smiled, remembering. "We talked for a minute afterward—he got a scratch in the arm, you know, in spite of me."

"How dreadful! Was he hurt much?"

"It's rather bloody, and deep, but he mustn't get it infected. Not here, in the tropics. I'm going to take him over to Dr. John's directly. He's in the most God-awful place— Hotel Mindora!"

"Mestizo!" drawled Victory scornfully. "Doesn't he know anybody? How odd!"

"I thought Doctor John might take him on as a paying guest. What do you think?" Cecil was restless, frowning, puzzled—pacing the sala, his long stride carrying him past successive portraits of Delgardas. Victory sat very still on the edge of the table and watched him. He thought how lovely she was with her corn-colored hair, her round white arms, and pink evening frock.

"Cecil—what *is* the matter?"

He hesitated, stopped a moment in front of the great Spanish desk, lifted a slender stiletto, examined it, then dropped it, and came back to her. The truth was, he hardly knew how to explain it.

"Victory—I can't get it! I can't make out what

that Chinaman wanted!" He started to walk up and down again. "Neil Winton never saw the man before! But, of course—there's one thing—"

Victory stirred, and blew a curl of smoke toward a dark corner.

"You said Mr. Winton spoke to the Chinaman? What did he say to him?" It was a significant question. He realized at once that it was a very penetrating question, and his face went blank.

"Well, by Jove!" She laughed and raised her eyebrows.

"You'd never make a detective, would you?"

"I might have thought of it. I dare say I should" —irritably— "but directly afterward something happened."

"What happened?" demanded his alert sister.

"I was coming home in the rain, thinking," he began slowly, "taking my time, when I saw a calesa come ripping down the street—that is, ripping for a calesa"—he was flinging words at her over his shoulder as he marched about—"but when it got opposite, there was a big ruddy man in it. Never saw *him* before—"

Victory waited, her fascinated face turned to his. She liked devious ways better than Cecil did.

"Well—?"

"Sitting beside the big man I saw somebody else—a Chinaman—" he looked intently at her. "Victory, it was Ten Yen!" The cigarette fell from her fingers, they gripped the sides of the table—

"Ten Yen, Cecil? My Lord! Ten Yen! What do you suppose has brought *him* here?"

"Well, it's something damned important! You can count on that! But listen, Victory—their calesa went on down to the river, and they got into the launch of the same Chinaman who attacked Winton. What do you think of that?"

"I think he's done something, Cecil!" Victory jumped down—she caught his arm, she was vivid, excited. "Something's happened to bring your Mr. Winton up against Ten Yen! Now—what do you suppose it it?"

"God knows! But the boy doesn't realize what's happened to him."

"I suppose he doesn't," said Victory slowly. "And what did you do then?"

"I stood in the gate and watched their boat speed down to the harbor. It was an old launch but it went like the wind."

Victory nodded—her blue eyes watchful, considering.

"Cecil—I tell you something's happening!" She walked over to the door and looked at the rain pounding on the tiled roof and deluging the garden. "It's queer Eric hasn't written. I wonder if he knows Ten Yen is here? Cecil—this will make a difference to us."

"Difference?" said Crewe. "Ten Yen in Manila makes a world of difference! My dear girl—*now* we must watch our step! I should be hearing from Eric; I'm going to write him tonight when I get home. I'll have to go now—Winton will be waiting. He must get that arm dressed." Victory was startled.

"Out in this storm? And you're not very well? Just listen to the rain!" she protested.

"What does that matter? It isn't cold. His arm can't wait—I've got to go," said Crewe hastily.

"Where's your raincoat?" Paying no attention to his remonstrances, she went into his bedroom, and brought it out, then stood in front of him, holding it up.

"Never mind, dear, I won't be long." He got into it, kissed her good-by, pulled his hat low over his eyes, and went out on the balcony. Victory was at his heels.

The storm-lashed areca palms dropped piteously over the drenched patio. The lamp threw a long ray of light over the old stone balustrade where the cadena de amor was clinging—

"Bye—" said Victory. "Hurry back—"

"Bye—" over his shoulder.

From the sala door she watched him cross the balcony with his characteristic long stride. Then his tall lean raincoated figure went slowly down the stone steps leading to the patio. She could hear and see the wild night it was. Suddenly an impulse seized her to stop him. She ran out on the balcony and called but the wind caught up her voice, and the rain lashed her face. Already he had crossed the patio, and was entering the covered passage. There was a constant swish-swish of shrubs and trees. Everything in the garden was moving. And back of her the vast, ancient house brooded mysteriously. . . .

## CHAPTER III

IN the silence, in the thick darkness and rain that was like sheeted vapor, the launch Cecil Crewe had watched slipped away from its moorings. It left the old Spanish wall, and the flat-bottomed native cascos, and the mat-covered bancas to move swiftly downstream. A narrow tarpaulin stretched across its bow sheltered Ten Yen and Mayhew, huddled in wicker chairs lashed to the pilot room. Behind them sat the squat Chinese captain, his competent hands on the wheel, his eyes mere slits, his head thrust forward to watch the river. One or two interisland boats, running for shelter, had already passed them. On the right they could see the blurred lights of the Muelle de la Industria; on the left the round towers of Fort Santiago bulked dark and formidable—their loopholes, like cavernous spying eyes on the little boat cutting a clean slither through the water. Mist screened Santiago's granite base—full of dark cells and secret passages which crept, mole-like to the river. Under the influence of the night, the storm, and their errand, all three men watched it nervously. The Chinese captain turned his head away and thought hard about the Venerable Mother Ma Tsu, friend of all Chinese sailors. The dangerous professions require the strongest faiths!

The wind blew a word now and then back to the captain, but his eyes were on the straight course of the river, the veiled and passing lights of the Muelle del Rio. His senses were very alert to the wind which blew off that great open bay toward which they were headed. For the most part his passengers were silent. Ten Yen sat erect—immovable—his black cloak drawn around him—his hands lost in its voluminous folds. Mayhew was hunched up, leaning his head against the side of the launch. Something had gone wrong! The Chinese captain knew it by the marble rigidity of the Small One's figure—by the querulous tone of Mayhew's voice. Not that he cared a withered lichee nut about the Englishman's temper. Perhaps he'd lost at the tables at Macao; or it might be that a singsong girl, or his mistress in Canton had turned a vixen. But these were things of no moment, for the Chinese captain despised Mayhew and all his ancestors. But the still Small One, sitting so silent—*he* was different! And he was not pleased. Every movement—even his slightest gesture—said so. Inwardly the Chinese captain quailed and muttered. He had failed, back there in the gate; the man of the flowery flag country had escaped him. And he would have to tell Ten Yen, and tell him soon—there was not even time to burn one placating candle before Mother Ma Tsu. He mulled over it as his launch approached the signal towers with their horizontal white lights, standing where the sluggish Pasig empties into the choppy waters of the bay.

They were in a world now that was a vast gray smother of sea and sky. Close to the long rows of docks lay the huddled shipping, with lights that winked in the rain, and masts that swayed in a fantastic rhythm. Farther out, great freighters were tugging at their anchors, their sails furled, decks battened down, all hands scurrying to make things shipshape against that threatening whine far back in the wind. The Chinese captain strained his ears—for no man, having heard it once, can forget it. Although the storm was far out on the Yellow Sea, the Number Two signal was already up. The Chinese captain shook his head—his hands clung like leeches to the wheel—he knew that winds from the third quadrant might be expected—and so his slant eyes were quick and vigilant.

"Lord—how it rains!" The words were Mayhew's—blown from his mouth. Ten Yen did not answer. He leaned forward, his restless black eyes not missing a single detail of the shipping, the lights, the misty night—his ears open to every whimper in the wind.

The Chinese captain steered in and out. A man of nerve and cunning, he knew his boat, and slipped it in among the freighters, making steadily for the harbor's mouth where the wind kicked up a devil's dance on the water. The lights of beautiful, crescent-shaped Manila Bay gleamed behind them, and they could hear the faint swish-swish of great waves pounding the rocky sea wall by the Luneta. Ahead were huge dim shapes with red and green riding lights—the fighting fleet of the Asiatic

squadron. The captain eyed them grimly. High up in the crow's nest the American warships were signaling; he could see the dot and dash of secret code and cryptic lights. Mayhew leaned forward.

"Damned Yankee warships!" he shouted to Ten Yen, who nodded.

Suddenly a boat, beautiful, white, brilliantly lighted, shot past them, headed for Manila. Three men, bareheaded and in slickers, stood in the bow, staring out—scanning the harbor shipping. Mayhew ripped out an oath, and Ten Yen shrank back under the tarpaulin. Then his slim hand rose in an imperious gesture—the captain veered sharply and fled into the shadow of a warship. They were so close to her steel sides that they could hear orders being bawled on the deck high above them. The Chinese captain slowed down and glanced back over his shoulder. Ten Yen twisted in his seat. That was the customs' boat, and the alert man in slickers was the Spanish Chief of customs with his two boarding officers. They looked back at her for a moment, but now she was only a fast-moving ghostly shape soon swallowed by mist and rain and moving waters. The captain grunted, Ten Yen resumed his old position, the launch swung around, darting past the warship, steering straight for the far-off flash of the Cavite light.

The wind sang shriller as they neared the entrance to the harbor. On their left Cavite was a vague blot of rainswept buildings with nothing but the rhythmical flashing light to mark the open sea. And the launch danced like a cockleshell; rising on

the crest of great waves, dipping into their trough, yet holding to her course. Open sea now—with the tide running in, and the captain fighting his way along the shoreline. He ground his yellow teeth, his hands ached, he braced his feet against a stanchion, while Ten Yen and Mayhew clung to their chairs. Then the launch swerved, shot down the crest of a breaker curved like a shell—she quivered—then slowly climbing the next white comber she was hurled suddenly into a quiet inlet. Just ahead of them there was a long dim outline that moved and swayed, and was a darker gray than the surrounding sky and sea; a boat, lying at anchor and looking like a ship asleep, and very faintly lit. As the launch turned, the lights of her pilot room picked out the boat's name and the city she came from—

"*Che Kiang*—Kowloon."

Close-cropped black heads peered from the sides of the *Che Kiang;* high-pitched Chinese voices jabbered; lights flared; there was a rattle of chains and orders; then, as the launch was made fast and the rope ladder dropped, Ten Yen rose—he shook out his black cloak and climbed with extraordinary agility hand over hand up to the freighter. Mayhew, breathing heavily, wiped his steaming face and started to follow, but a hand caught his sleeve.

"Catch 'em something! Velly important! Must tell!" It was the Chinese captain.

"What in thunder!" Mayhew turned.

"Ai-yah! Too muchee wind—to muchee lain—no

can talk—must tell—now!" insisted the captain. Mayhew looked at him, then shrugged.

"Oh—all right—come along—but it's on your own head if he doesn't like it."

Externally, the *Che Kiang* was exactly like any other freighter of twenty-five hundred tons, that was rough and sturdily built and plied between Shanghai and Saigon. She carried a small crew of Chinese sailors, and a miscellaneous cargo of rice, sugar, hemp, silk, any commodity which might find a profitable market. She was a dirty ship—the quarters of her captain and her crew were small and greasy; but the cabin of Ten Yen might have been a room in his own compound. In it were the lacquered cabinets, the hanging lanterns, of stretched silk, the thick Chinese rug of imperial yellow, the fragile porcelains, and the rare Chinese hangings that made him feel at home. And here was the little yellow bird, in its tall gold cage, that Ten Yen carried with him when he could. He was a connoisseur of birds. When Mayhew entered he was speaking to it, but as the sturdy figure of the captain emerged from behind Mayhew's back Ten Yen stiffened. It was an unprecedented thing for the Chinese captain to enter Ten Yen's cabin.

The squat little captain knew it. He stood there, inwardly calling on Ma Tsu to protect him against the small fierce One whose long line of distinguished ancestors must have harked back to the Honorable Tiger Cat. There was a faint odor of incense in the room, along with a very faint odor

of stale opium from a pipe—and the cold breath of Ten Yen's strange personality. The captain sensed all these things, and shivered.

"He says he knows something," explained Mayhew.

Ten Yen sat down suddenly in his square teak chair, with its marble seat. His fine thin hands were outspread on his black satin knees; his feet in their white stockings and stubby black satin Chinese slippers drew close together, but did not touch the floor; his close-grained yellow skin rose above the straight black collar of his tunic; but his eyes were cold and calm, as if he drew his strength from a strong inner force—mostly evil. They were fastened immovably on the trembling Chinese captain.

"Speak!" he said.

The captain, sucking in his breath and moistening his lips, began to jabber in Chinese.

"What the hell," cried Mayhew, "do you think I can make of that—"

Into Ten Yen's eyes, studying the Captain, had come a kind of brightness; the sturdy captain quailed.

"May the Three Kinds of Abundance ever be your lot!" he said servilely.

"Speak pidgin!" commanded Ten Yen.

"This night!" he began, "allee samee sit in boat by wall. Smokee little pipe—watchee storm—think'em lain—think'em time to go. Ai-yah—tall man walk through gate— One piecie man of flowery flag kingdom—you savvy—?"

"What the devil?" from Mayhew.

"American," interpreted Ten Yen.

"Him velly fliendly. Him say—you know'em *Che-Kiang?* I say-no catch'em *Che Kiang.* Him light one piecie smoke—say 'Maskie—good night'—go away. I go too—close like hell—"

Mayhew started forward. "Ten Yen—do you suppose—?"

"Shih." Ten Yen lifted his fine hand, then let it drop again. "The feet of the foolish one have caught in the trap—"

Mayhew, for a minute, was startled by the expression of his eyes, then he laughed.

"Well, I'll be damned! Here we've been hunting him all over this infernal hot town, and he walks right into the net." He turned to the captain. "What did he look like? Did you see his hair?"

"Hair? No—no can see hair. Him so tall—so wide"—measuring with his dirty stubby fingers—"wear velly old Chinese jade ring."

"It was dark—how could you see that?" said Mayhew scornfully.

"Aie—him light one piecie smoke," said the captain, giving Mayhew an ugly look. "Him go along wall to big gate—I go—velly close. Velly dark in gate." He turned to Ten Yen. "If white debil ask about *Che Kiang*—must die—I know!" Ten Yen nodded.

"I take out knife"—there was a bright flash of steel— "So!—" He struck down with a swift dramatic gesture that made Mayhew jump and even Ten Yen move a little.

"Did you kill him?— Speak!"

But the captain had dropped to the floor, he was gibbering apologies to Ten Yen in Chinese, his teeth chattered—his terror was so plain that the Small One smiled cruelly. Then he caught his fan from his sleeve and clicked it open. It was a gesture of dismissal; the Chinese captain stumbled to his feet and backed unsteadily to the door, which closed behind him.

"What did he say, Ten Yen? What happened?" Mayhew was fuming with impatience.

"It matters not," Ten Yen lighted his long pipe. "The man got away. He did not see his hair of Yin Chi red. Fool!"

Mayhew's face was flushed, he walked up and down.

"Well, he saw a good deal. He saw more than the ricksaw coolie did in Kowloon. I don't understand that ring—a Chinese ring."

Ten Yen drew little breaths of smoke from his long pipe. He was so still he looked like one of the painted figures on the Chinese panel which stood behind him.

"The American said 'Maskie'—so he knows pidgin. He takes a Wu Jin freighter—he wears a Chinese ring—" Ten Yen's black eyes were turned speculatively on Mayhew. "I think it will not be so easy."

"You mean—he's not so bally simple after all—eh?"

"Shih!" Ten Yen was withdrawn, inscrutable. His analytical Chinese mind turned it over. "Who

*is* he—that he knows the name of the *Che Kiang?* There is the meat in the lichee nut, Mayhew."

And Mayhew was astounded. This fact was so ominous that it seemed almost incredible. He hadn't thought about that! He stared at Ten Yen—he always took his cue from the Mandarin.

"It's a damned dangerous puzzle! Of course, we'll find him now. In the morning I'll go to every hotel in Manila, I'll comb the place!"

Ten Yen's disturbed spirit showed itself in a certain tenseness of his slender body; a restless shifting of his black eyes from Mayhew to his pipe.

"To-night!" he said decisively. "You will go now, we waste not one moment! You saw the Customs boat out there by the warships. You know what *that* means! The white man—and the key—yes, we must get them—but listen!" Ten Yen's frail hands were lifted in a gesture that commanded silence. Outside, around the ship, a wind was riding high; traveling vast distances; the typhoon whine in it. Mayhew turned a white face to Ten Yen.

"My God! We may be forced in—or pounded to pieces on the rocks!" he cried roughly.

"Shih." Ten Yen's inward vision was following the wild sweep of that storm across the Yellow Sea from the China coast.

"It's a dirty night to go out in again. Well, tell 'em to get me a drink! I'm wet to the skin now! Where shall I meet you in the morning?" The Small One hesitated. He was rising from his seat—motioning to Mayhew to help himself to bottles

and glasses. As Mayhew hurriedly swallowed his liquor, Ten Yen's eyes were on him. When he reached for the second drink, hands as thin as bird's claws caught his arm.

"Number Two signal is up!" said Ten Yen quietly.

"What?" Mayhew's glass went down with a thud on the table.

"Shih! One white light—one red light—coming past Santiago." He leveled a finger at Mayhew's drink. "One is enough—it dulls the brain."

"Huh!" There was a snarl in Mayhew's tone, but he buttoned his raincoat hurriedly and pulled his cap down lower. If the second signal was up—then things looked bad!

Ten Yen walked up on the windy deck with him. After Mayhew had scrambled down the swaying rope ladder to the launch, he could still see the figure of Ten Yen silhouetted against the brilliant orange patch that was his open door. That tiny figure, his black cloak fluttering around him, his pie-shaped hat quite clearly defined, his long fine hand raised in a gesture of remote farewell, had exerted for many years a strange fascination over Mayhew. As the launch chugged; pitching—tossing—turning—her lights picked up once more the white letters high up on the freighter's prow.

Crouched under the leaky tarpaulin, Mayhew watched that name. How much the old boat had seen—what things had been done on her—what enterprises they had planned together in Ten Yen's splendid cabin—and most of them had jolly well

come off! What a brain the Small One had! When other people said the game was up, he flicked an eyelid and began to fight! Mayhew laughed sardonically. What a gullible world, that knew her only as a tramp freighter—the *Che Kiang*—Kowloon!

## CHAPTER IV

MAYHEW found it quicker, easier to come in, than to go out. With the wind at its stern—carried swiftly by the incoming tide the launch made its way into the harbor. Pitching—careening over the white caps—it passed the Cavite light, threaded its course among the warships, scurried under the bows of freighters, turned at last into the wide mouth of the Pasig river. The captain sped on past Muelle de la Industria—past Fort Santiago—and the Customs—and tied up among the native craft near the Spanish Gate.

Many of the mat-covered bancas were lashed together. Some of the cascos were well anchored with ropes and pulleys to the shore. The natives knew what the Number Two signal meant. Its red and white light flashed the message that vessels must send down light yards and masts; steamers be ready to use their engines, and launches—like the Chinese captain's—keep out of Manila Bay. At any moment the typhoon, far in the north now, might swing in a wide arc, sweep down and spend its fury on the Islands. And there was the *Che Kiang*, outside the Cavite light!

Mayhew groaned; stiff from his cramped position, he stood up and stretched himself wearily. Then he got out of the launch and struck off

through the Spanish Gate toward the Walled City. His face was black as he passed under the deep arch with its swinging Spanish lantern. If the Chinese captain hadn't been such a clumsy fool, if his knife had been surer, his fingers quicker, they would have the key and the *Che Kiang* could come in past the Customs and tie up at her moorings instead of being anchored in a risky inlet. A clever man's game was always being gummed by some clumsy fool or other. People called it Fate, but he didn't; he called it the most bally rotten luck!

He started up the empty street. Although the rain had almost stopped, wind swooped down around the tiled roofs and into the patios. Coming in he had planned to go to all of the hotels in the old town first. Pesos would open any native lips that he was likely to encounter. And the hotels were not so many. He checked them off. There were the Estrella and the Hotel Mindora and the Bonita, At which one of them would the American be stopping? Of course, he might not be in the Walled City—he might be anywhere in big sprawling Manila with its clubs, its hotels, its white settlements in winding and far-flung streets. He might —but Mayhew felt his best bet was certainly the old town first.

The Estrella yielded no information. Its register for the day was blank. The small night clerk grumbled about it good-naturedly.

"You can see for yourself, señor—there iss no one," turning the grimy book toward Mayhew. The

deserted lobby was lonely—the night clerk wanted to talk but Mayhew glanced at him, at his empty register, and said good night.

The next name on his list was the Mindora. It lay almost at the end of a narrow street. He could see the blue-white electric light in its old lantern. A disgusting rhinoceros beetle crawled slowly across the doorsill. The faint whiff of sour wine stung his nostrils, along with the stale smell of native cooking. He could hear the steady pound and flap of a loose sign or awning somewhere. And still he hesitated. It seemed impossible that a Yankee should stop here—they loved their comforts! But the Mindora was popular with seafaring men. He remembered that the captains of freighters, of the coastwise boats, of the great flotilla of alien craft bobbing in and out of these tropic waters frequented it. He had heard the food was cheap and good. And the American had taken a Wu Jin, or Japanese freighter, from Kowloon—so he was either cheap, or he was in hiding. Mayhew wondered which? He would have paid a good many pesos to solve this riddle. Entering the door he walked down the long corridor to the Mindora's desk.

He glanced just once at the proprietor lounging behind it. But in that instant Mayhew changed his method of approach. Direct methods would not do with this mestizo. Wise experience must match Malay cunning. Here was no friendly half-caste—but a light brown mestizo in whites, with a flashy imitation stick pin in the red tie below his stiff

white collar. His eyes were black—shifting—restless; his lips were red and full, and his thin suggestive hands had fingernails in mourning. Mayhew had not sat in on fan tan in Penang or baccarat at Macao; he had not lived by his wits in the Orient without learning to read the eyes of men. Tell this man nothing, his judgment warned him.

"A room for the night, señor?" The mestizo's eyes shifted past him to the street entrance.

"No. And you don't need to look behind me. I've not brought a 'querida' with me either; if I had, I'd take her to a better place than this."

The mestizo's eyes flashed. He put his perfumed cigarette down on the desk. It smelt of musk; his black hair was pomaded and scented too.

"My friend, Captain Henry from Hong Kong, wrote me that he was coming—doesn't he usually stop here?"

Mayhew left it at that. He would see what he got out of this mestizo.

"Si, señor—but he iss not come."

Leaning carelessly back against the desk Mayhew's blue eyes looked the half-caste over.

"See here—you're mistaken. I got a radiogram to-day. Probably he registered while you were out—somewhere." He said it with his blunt, bold, you-can-go-to-hell air, that would hurt mestizo pride, and arouse instant opposition.

The mestizo cast another quick look at his register.

"No, señor"—positively— "he iss not come. I swear it!"

"Huh," said Mayhew with scorn, "you can't read!"

"Can't read?—Carramba!" The brown fingers shook, as the mestizo switched the register around. "Señor—you it iss—you it iss who make mistake—you see? One only iss there—but not the Captain Henry—no."

Instantly Mayhew's eyes ran down the page. He felt a sudden shock—a stiffening through all his body. God! The American was here—right here—in this hotel—asleep! The puzzled mestizo watched him. The man was quick, and Mayhew saw that he had begun to wonder if the situation was as simple as it seemed? . . . Now—to get away from the sly eyes behind the desk.

"You're right. Here—get yourself a drink," throwing a few pesos down. "I'll be around in the morning—"

Then he sauntered out the door but his steps quickened when he reached the pavement. Lord, what luck! what astounding, putrid luck! Hadn't he been an easy bird—that mestizo? By using a little cunning Mayhew had wormed Neil Winton's name, his city, even his room number out of the clutches of this old town which must cloak a good many mysteries—one way or another. Regular fool's luck! Ten Yen would hardly believe it!

He walked on past the little closed shops, then hesitated. There must be a rear entrance, for the hotel had a patio, of course, he had lived long enough in the tropics to know that. And outside galleries would lead to upper rooms. He measured

with his eye the distance from the Mindora to the corner where he stood. Then he turned down a street to the right, passing more little closed shops until he came to a black alley. Alongside pails of refuse—mounds of stinking vegetation—Mayhew prowled, walking softly—watching doors set in the walls—listening. These natives never went to sleep. Thank God it was a black and stormy night—if there had been a moon they would have been laughing, talking, or making love until the break of day. Once or twice he heard voices, but the long length of the alley drowsed between high walls.

When he reached the door which should belong to the Mindora he tried it hurriedly. It was unlocked and led directly into the patio. He closed it and stood peering about. A ship's lantern on the first floor threw swaying drunken shadows. He saw the pale misty wings of the house—the shrouded balconies—the overhanging eaves. Gad! it looked eerie!

But he was afraid to use his flashlight. Too many windows overlooked the patio. He knew there must be an outside stairway, so he felt about, while trees and shrubs swayed in the wind and their wet fingers brushed his shoulders. Damn it, of course there *were* steps. He shuffled, peered, hunted, stumbling upon a small opening between walls; there were the steps.

The muscles of his face twitched nervously as he felt his way up them in the dark. How many months had he and Ten Yen been trying to get this key? . . . And to think that he was going to

succeed where Ten Yen had failed! The corridor was long. In the dark he walked as softly as a sailor or a cat. People were sleeping all around under their bed nets—the hot fitful sleep of the tropics. He wondered if this was the right corridor? It was as black as pitch in here, with wind rustling the bamboo outside and not a soul about. The night —the corridor—the circumstances—all exactly right! His light flickered on the walls, then suddenly was extinguished. He had found the number. His fingers were on the door knob, it turned in his hand. He closed it quietly behind him. The American had probably been drunk when he went to bed —or a little careless.

His gun was ready, his nerves braced, his flashlight in his left hand—swift actions that clicked as if they had been timed; ready—all ready! He turned his flashlight on the shrouded bed looming in the blackness. The bed was empty! He looked around the room—the room was empty! He had been cheated—outwitted! He stared at the bed stupidly—accusingly—he had been completely fooled! There was signs of hasty packing, but that was all. A chair was drawn up close to the bed, on the sheet was the imprint of a heavy body—on the tiled floor a pile of gray ashes and dead matches. He saw that two had been there!

Mayhew began to curse; fluently, with point, vigor, and resource, he cursed the room, the American, the mestizo, the key! Then his foot struck something on the tiled floor, but it was only a folding map of the Walled City. He thrust it in his

pocket. For his troubled, his careful thinking, the pains with which he had climbed those steep stairs, this was all he had to show Ten Yen! A map of the old Walled City! He put out his searchlight, opened the door, and left the room.

He went down as quietly as he had come up, but much more swiftly. Turning out of the dark alley into the street—stumbling over the uneven pavement—he swore at the storm, the Chinese captain whose knife had slipped, and the whole infernal rotten tropics!

## CHAPTER V

THREE hours earlier in that wet and stormy night, Cecil Crewe was hurrying down the slippery steps of the old Delgarda Casa. Before he plunged into the darkness of the patio, he glanced back at Victory, who was standing, a windblown graceful shape under the big Spanish lamp. He waved to her, but of course she could not see him. Then he skirted the low wide fountain, passed under the mango tree, into the passage, and out through the tall iron gates.

As he walked down the street, wind shrieked and drove along the cobbles; behind every barred window the native life hummed and surged with amazing fecundity. Nothing stopped it! Neither the rain slapping the white houses, and pouring into the iron balconies—nor the wind—nor the night! Although the streets in front of him were miniature rivers, he saw two slim brown girls remove their straw chinelas to wade across, their long skirts held high above their brown knees, their black heads covered with scarfs. In doorways and puddles native children, wet to the skin, played as casually as if they were part of the elements, and grew like the vegetation with startling luxuriance.

He looked on at it, while his long stride covered the narrow pavement, and his thin figure in its close

drawn raincoat moved like a shadow past the tiny shops and the wind-swept patios. But he was quite withdrawn from it. His mind was on the launch which had slipped through the mists of the Pasig and out of the crowded harbor. What was its destination— Why was it going so hurriedly?— And who was the white man who traveled with Ten Yen? He asked himself all these questions. Ten Yen in Manila—Ten Yen driving through the Walled City. It made a world of difference!

His feet turned into a lonely street fit for shady nocturnal adventures, and as he rounded a corner he saw the long gleams of the Hotel Mindora's lights on the wet pavement. Sickly bluish-green lights streaming from unshaded electric bulbs—the shabby, furtive Hotel Mindora! As he stepped into the narrow office that smelt of sour wine and garlic, his mouth tightened in distaste. What could have brought Neil Winton to a hotel kept by a mestizo? —filled with half-castes—Filipinos—and all the discouraged and impoverished flotsam of the Islands? An odd hostelry for him to choose! He was still thinking of it as he followed the half-naked Filipino boy up the stairs and down the corridor to Winton's room.

He turned the handle of the door and stood there. Something had happened. The big Spanish bed was littered with Winton's things. His bag gaped as if he had been flinging clothes at it; thin wraiths of dead cigarettes wavered below the one electric light that hung from the ceiling. And in the midst of four bare white walls stood a distracted red-

haired young man with sweat streaming down his face. Why it couldn't be more than half an hour since he left him in the street. Crewe stared! What in thunder had happened to make him look like this?

"Hello—Mr. Crewe! Come in!"

Crewe walked in and closed the door.

"I say—what's up?" he began. "What's the matter?"

With intent eyes, Winton faced him. Whatever the thing was, Crewe knew it was serious. He sat down on the hard Spanish chair.

"See here—" he began. Neil dropped his brushes into his bag, glanced at him.

"It's a rotten night, isn't it?"

"See here, old man," said Crewe again, watching him closely. "Something's wrong! It doesn't take half an eye to see that! Can't I help?" There was a sympathetic note in his voice. "You might give me a try, you know."

"I can't, Mr. Crewe. I—I'm in the very devil of a mess!"

The ghost of a smile glimmered in Cecil Crewe's eyes. Probably the boy had been in some escapade.

"I know, I've lived out here long enough. Almost anything can happen in the Far East."

"Oh, it isn't that kind of thing," said Neil sharply. "I'm in a damned serious situation. I'd like your advice. I'd like to tell you, but I—I—well, the trouble is—it's not a *safe* secret."

Cecil Crewe's eyebrows shot up.

"I've never dealt in very safe secrets. I'm a

journalist—an investigator for my government. Of course, if a man were looking for a safe berth he wouldn't choose it. It's often touch and go—so often that I rather like it—" drawling.

Neil flushed. Suddenly he sat down on the bed and looked across at him.

"I'll have to tell somebody"—thoughtfully. "Somebody's got to know! Something might happen out here—there would be things to see to—letters —papers—"

Crewe lifted his eyebrows.

"Is it as bad as that?"

Neil nodded and for a moment there was silence in the hot little room with its staring walls and bright electric light. They listened to rain beating the balcony floor and splashing against the window while they studied each other. It was clear that Neil was wondering how to begin.

"You see, I had come out from New York on the *President Taft*—and I was in Peking—on my way here to Manila on business. I couldn't get a liner at Shanghai so I took a coastwise boat to Hong Kong—do you know Hong Kong?"

"Rather. I live there, a lot of the time," said Crewe, smiling.

"Oh, do you? Well, when I came in my boat docked at Kowloon—you know the old Chinese city across from Hong Kong? It was very late and I decided to spend the night there and go across on the ferry in the morning. But as a matter of fact —I never got to Hong Kong at all." A faint surprise showed in Crewe's face. "No—never once!

All I saw of it was the Peak from my bedroom window and the lights going up—up—to meet the stars. Well, you know Hong Kong!" Neil's intent eyes studied him, and Crewe nodded. It was idle to tell this excited young man how well he knew Hong Kong. But he was wondering what had happened in that ancient city of Kowloon with its blind streets and fetid alleys.

"Of course it was all strange to me—the lanterns, the smells—the gongs—the streets crowded with Chinese. I thought it was great! After dinner I got a rickshaw coolie to take me for a ride—oh, anywhere! I didn't care where. You see, I was just putting in the evening. We went down past the restaurants—the singsong jazzy places—but I got bored with that. So then we went out toward the country; we passed a quarry; then on into the section where the rich Chinese live in the big compounds. Well, there was a lane there, and we were going down it between high walls—just taking it easy, you know—" He stopped—his eyes withdrawn—his thoughts on Kowloon, while Crewe watched him.

"You could smell the lilies over the wall and the wet grass—and things. Drums somewhere in the distance. I heard a singsong girl—somebody must have been giving a dinner. Beautiful night!" He stopped short, thinking what a beautiful night it was in Kowloon—

Cecil Crewe nodded. He could see it—and smell it too, Kowloon, ringed by its nine hills—quiet

under its ragged mists—a city where anything could happen.

"Go on," he said quietly.

"It was a long lane," said Neil after a minute, "and the walls were high. There wasn't much to see—but after a while we came to the biggest compound we'd passed yet. There were lights inside the wall—we got a shimmer out in the lane. Almost at the end of that compound was a moon-shaped gate, painted Chinese blue, studded with brass nails, and set back in the wall. I'll never forget it. It was one of those things you never *can* forget! I told the coolie to stop—I wanted to look at it. Yellow lanterns were either side the gate—high up—and there was a locust tree in bloom too. Showers of white blossoms dropping down—wonderful effect! I asked the coolie whose place it was? He said, 'Catch'em velly high up Chinese general,' and I believed him. You'd never see anything like that gate—or that wall—at home. He'd have to be an infernally high up general to own that place—"

"I know the compound," said Crewe, leaning forward.

"You do?" Neil lifted a worried puzzled face. "Have you seen it?"

"Yes; go on. What happened next?"

When he began to speak again Neil's voice was lower—a breathless quality had crept into it, as if he were back again in Kowloon in a narrow dark lane.

"Well, I'll always remember the smell of those lilies in that lane—" He ran his fingers through his wiry red hair. "I sat there for a while looking at the Moon Gate, with the coolie half asleep between the shafts, and it was so still—! Once or twice I heard crickets in the grass, but that was all. There wasn't another sound. It was sort of eerie sitting there—in front of the big blue gate and the yellow lanterns—with the clouds drifting across the sky—and not a sound. Then I heard a scream! Close—behind the wall! It was so sudden it hit the night! Shrill—with a lot of fear in it! Never heard a scream so full of fear. The coolie jumped—'Aie! Aie!' he yelled—but I was out over the wheels and there was the wall, probably eight feet high, in front of me. Too high to climb!

"I stood there like a fool—just looking at it. Wondering what to do next—hearing scrambling on the other side—heavy breathing! Wondering what the devil was going on behind that wall! Well; I never got a chance to do anything. The next minute hands—a white man's hands shot up over the wall—then his face followed; dark, boyish, good-looking face. 'What's the matter?' I called to him. He looked down and saw me in the road. 'Ayudame!' he cried. 'Ayudame!' No—it wasn't exactly a cry—it was a kind of moan—choked! I can't explain—I don't know what there was in it—but somehow—it got me. Strange word—isn't it?—'Ayudame?' That was all he said.

"I could see in his eyes that he'd been hurt. You never saw anything like his face, Mr. Crewe—he

was holding himself up there on the wall with his hands—it must have been an awful strain. His hands clutched—and slipped! I jumped as high as I could to help him—but I couldn't reach him! I strained and stretched—trying to get a hold, but I couldn't reach his hands. Then I heard voices behind the wall—Chinese voices—threatening. Inside—those devils were trying to pull him back. His face was drawn, white—it seems to me I'll never forget it." Neil dropped his head for an instant in his hands. "No—I'll never forget it!"

"My God!" Crewe felt the blood rising in his own face. "What an awful thing to see!"

"Awful!" Neil nodded—he stared out at the storm beating against the window without seeing it at all. "And I couldn't do a thing!"

An aura of heat swept their faces from the unshaded electric light that cast strange lights on the high whitewashed ceiling. They could hear the steady beat—beat of rain on the tiled roof—an occasional calesa on the cobbles below. Crewe's absorbed face was turned to him.

"Go on," he said. "Go on!"

Neil rubbed the back of his hand across his forehead.

"Yes. Well, I never in my life had such a feeling of danger as I had standing there in front of that wall. You see the rickshaw coolie had run away. There wasn't a sign of life—nobody anywhere. I was trying my best to reach him and there was the damned mud crumbling under his fingers—and those devils inside pulling him back! He didn't have

a chance—really; He began to slip—slip—and I saw the horror in his face. I knew he couldn't make it. It made me sick—cold! He flung something down then—but I didn't notice—not for a minute. Then he dropped back! Things were going on behind the wall—I heard scuffling—voices—groans—then silence! Absolute—complete—silence!"

"My God!" said Crewe slowly. "Did they get him?"

Neil threw him a strange somber look. "Of course they got him!" He felt in his pocket and pulled out a little box.

"This," he said frowning," is what he threw down. I picked it up and put it in my pocket. You see the damned cowardly coolie had taken his rickshaw and run away—so there I was—several miles from the hotel—on a strange road—standing there and holding—this!"

Crewe glanced at it; he looked at Neil's white strained face. He had been prepared for an escapade, but not for a moment had he expected a tragic tale like this. He sat motionless—fascinated.

"I didn't know what to do—I stood there listening—but there wasn't another sound—just ghastly quiet. I tiptoed over to the Moon Gate—still not a sound. The stars were gone; fog was drifting down around the locust tree—the Moon Gate was too high to peer over. So I gave it a little shove expecting to find it fastened tight—but it wasn't! The gate was heavy; so I pushed a little harder—"

Crewe stared. "Why didn't you get out of there at once?"

"I couldn't!" A pair of harassed brown eyes looked back at him. "Don't you see? I couldn't! I felt what a rotten thing it was to go away and leave him like that! You couldn't do it," he added, watching Crewe. "No decent chap would do it. I shoved the gate a little harder—do you know—it opened! Not very far, but far enough for me to see—" His voice trailed off—

"That was a damn-fool thing to do," said Crewe impatiently. "What *did* you see?"

## CHAPTER VI

"A GARDEN—I saw a garden—" Neil was looking down at the box and didn't speak again for a moment.

There was a suspicious moisture in his eyes. That dark youth in the compound had made a profound impression on him!

"I saw a boy, a crumpled black shape on the ground. Two Chinamen stood looking down at him. One was a big Manchu—a giant; the other one was little and he wore a black cloak. I caught a glimpse of lanterns—flowers—bronzes—walks—a superb garden, dim and blurred. I must have made a slight noise, for the big Chinaman turned. I think he saw me—but I wasn't sure. Anyway he started for the gate, and I lit out. Sneaking along the walls, hugging every piece of shade, for the fog had parted and there was the infernal beautiful moon! I tore down the road until finally I saw the lights of the quarry—a big glare like hell's fires against the black inverted bowl.

"At the quarry I picked up another rickshaw boy and he took me back to the hotel. It must have been after midnight—there wasn't a soul about. Only the night clerk. I was glad to be back in my room. My God!—it was like coming out of a hideous nightmare. You know the way you feel when you

wake up and find it wasn't true?—I wanted to feel that way—but I couldn't! For there was this!" He turned the box over in his fingers, and Crewe's eyes followed the gleam of its inlay curiously. "This thing—this." He kept turning it.

"Here—open it!" said Neil, handing it to him.

With a mingling of distaste and excitement Crewe touched a jeweled button at one side, and the little box flew open. It was lined with satin, yellow, fragile with age—and in it lay a key. Crewe's surprised eyes lifted to Winton's for a moment, then dropped again to the box. Neil nodded.

"That's exactly the way I felt," he said as Crewe took out the key and turned it over.

It was a sturdy gold key about three inches long —heavily chased, rather flat than round. An old key. On the top of it was a crest set in square-cut diamonds. Crewe bent close—he was amazed at its beauty.

"It's seventeenth century work; see here—and here—" Neil was pointing out details. "I think the crest looks French—I'm not sure—but I've studied crests. Look—see how bright it is—how the diamonds sparkle. That key's been used—"

Crewe glanced at him suddenly. Of course, he had been studying the key, yet it was odd that he was so certain about its period. He thought it was rather odd too, for an American to be up on crests—

"By Jove, I think you're right!" Crewe was turning it over in his fingers. "What do you suppose it unlocks?"

"I don't know. But can't you see how strange it was to go out for a rickshaw ride—just as anybody might do—and come in with that? When I saw it I didn't know what to think. I walked around my room trying to make up my mind. Finally I went over to the window and stepped out in the little iron balcony. Down below were the docks—mat sheds—warehouses of Kowloon; the narrow strip of black bay full of big ships and little ships—junks—freighters—lights and reflections of lights! The shoreline of Hong Kong was a wide sweeping curve of silver—and above it stood the Peak—pyramided with lights—standing there strictly for law and order. Oh, I knew that! You people can be counted on for law and order, Mr. Crewe. If I went over there and told them what I'd seen—"

"Well, why didn't you?" said Crewe sharply.

"Suppose I had?" Neil turned on him, his eyes flashing. "What would have happened? Suppose I told them I'd seen a white man murdered in a Chinese compound? How could I prove it? Nobody could prove it. It was night—I hadn't even clearly seen him myself—only his face—over the wall. And of course he never would be found. Neither the little Chinaman nor anybody in his compound would have heard of him. You know how the Chinese are—You know how they act—when they don't want to tell—don't you?"

Neil looked at the pale English face, with its lean clean-cut jaw, at the long powerful figure in the hard Spanish chair, and Cecil Crewe stared back. He was thinking hard. What would he have done?—

what could he have done? He would have been met by blank polite Chinese faces—serene denials—complete disappearance of all evidence.

"That's true," he said slowly, "that's very true."

"Then, there was this!" Neil tapped the box in Crewe's hand with his finger." This! Standing out there—watching the lights and the black waters of the bay I got a new thought. It seemed to jump out of the night at me. I began to see the meaning of this key. They killed him, expecting to get it—didn't they? But he fooled them—"

Cecil Crewe snapped the little box shut and gave it back to him. The drama of the key told in this hot disordered room with Winton twitching his arm from time to time, and the gray lizards flipping their tails around the walls had held him motionless. But he was feeling troubled. There were a number of things here—

"I think you're right about the key. But still—well—it's curious. Why was that white man, at that time of night, in a Chinese compound?"

"Very curious. I don't know why he was there. But I decided to say nothing to the authorities in Hong Kong—"

"Yes, but I say—it's dangerous keeping this key."

Neil nodded. "I know it. But this key means something damned important. I'll keep it until I find out what it is. A chap doesn't throw a key over a wall with his last breath unless it *does* mean something damned important. I'm not going to let that Chinaman get away with it—"

Crewe knew he meant it. He watched him stand-

ing in the hot ugly bare room, his shirt open, his red hair on end, and thought how few things give a man more power than the quality of daring. . . . Even with his analytical mind, his cooler nature, Crewe suddenly felt electrical. Flicking the ashes off his cigarette he walked over to the window to conceal a rush of feeling—of admiration!

"Well, and that was all?" His voice was not quite casual.

"No. That wasn't all. After I decided to keep the key I went to bed."

"Did you sleep?" staring.

"Yes. I slept until two o'clock and then, I woke up. I don't know what woke me. I don't know what made me get up and walk over to the window. Maybe it was to see the lights on the Peak—but you never know these things. The room next to mine had a window that opened on my balcony. When I went to bed there was no one in the room because I remembered the window was open a few inches and it was dark. The white lace curtains blew in and out. But now, I could hear a hum, like people talking. I stood there a minute—looking at the bay—wondering what I was going to do in the morning—when I went to Hong Kong. When suddenly I heard somebody in the next room say—'Hell! Ten Yen—I tell you the key isn't here!'

"The next thing I knew I was out on the balcony trying to see in under the shade of the window—with those infernal Nottingham lace curtains blowing in my face. I never did know how I got there, so don't ask!"

Crewe didn't. He was speechless, staring at him.

"I saw a bedroom like mine. Standing in the middle of it, looking around, was the Chinaman I'd seen in the garden. The little one in the long cloak. He studied everything. Beside him stood an Englishman he called Mayhew. He was a big, red-faced man, barelegged except for linen shorts. They were both looking around hard. They were hunting something. Clothes were scattered on the bed—the floor—the bureau—a man's clothes. They looked at everything. The Englishman even slit the pillows and looked inside. I bet there wasn't a button or a shirt stud that escaped those two—nothing! I was lying almost flat on the iron balcony—the window was only open a few inches, so I had to strain my neck. I could see more of their feet and hands than their faces. But I could hear almost everything they said.

"I don't think they'd been talking long. I heard the Chinaman say, 'I searched him, but there was nothing.' The Englishman walked around opening and closing drawers—looking in the closet—looking in every nook and corner. Finally, he went back to the bureau and picked up a package of cigarettes and smelled them. They must have been perfumed, because he laughed; sneering—*you* know. He took out a cigarette and lit it. 'Well, he won't need these any more; damn him! He had it coming to him.'

"Then I understood. It was like a lightning flash. This room belonged to the white man they had killed in the compound and those two were hunting for the box in the pocket of my pajamas—and I

was not ten feet away! I began to feel cold, and it wasn't all the fog that wrapped my legs, either. It was uncanny, I can tell you—out there on the balcony looking in. They were hard and fierce—those two. It was in their faces—their eyes. They knew about life. They knew about some kinds of life—pretty damned well—I could see that. They were a competent pair.

"Finally, when they'd looked everywhere, at everything, the Englishman came over and stood close to Ten Yen. I could see his hands. Big, rather well shaped, with light fuzzy hairs all over their backs. 'We've got to find it. We're in the hell of a mess if we don't! The *Che Kiang* is halfway to Manila now, and she can't get in—she won't dare to land without the key.' He had a rough voice. It sounded savage. He was mad all through. I saw the Chinaman's black eyes roam all around. 'Be quiet—speak lower,' he said. And my heart stopped. He appeared to be looking straight at the white lace curtains blowing in and out—and there I, was—crouched behind them."

## CHAPTER VII

"NOT ten feet away"—Crewe's tone was rasping, quick. "Did they see you?"

Neil looked at him steadily. "For a minute I thought they did. Then I remembered that it was dark outside; the moon was gone—fog was drifting in. I could hear pan-pan pan-pan from something down the street. All my senses—especially eyes and ears—had grown devilishly acute. I felt all eyes and ears. My neck was so stiff from peering up that I was afraid it would crack if I bent it. My fingers ached; by this time my body through my silk pajamas was printed with every bolt, nut, bar on the iron balcony. I didn't mind. I *lived* in those few minutes out there—watching those two, feeling the key in my pocket. I lay there thinking how I was going to outwit them. Never in my life have I been as pleased with myself as I was just then—well, it didn't last long. Ten Yen had picked up a Panama hat from the chair and was ripping out its bright green lining. 'Look'—he held it up—'Baliwag—Walled City—it tells too much!' "

"Walled City!" It was a stupefied exclamation from Crewe.

Neil nodded. "'Baliwag—Walled City,'" he repeated, "that's what they said. And I lay there

wondering what it meant. It sounded mysterious. Then I saw Ten Yen draw himself up like a man who has come to a decision. I never saw a little man look terrible before—I didn't know he could—but he can. His face was cold—there was a sort of deadly calm about it. 'Shih!' he said, 'it was not on his body; it is not here; the white man in the Moon Gate picked it up.' His thin hands were working like a cat's claws. He said: 'Mayhew, I get this white man's rickshaw coolie; and before the priests in the temple eat their morning rice, I get this white man. You will see, Mayhew—I get him.'

"The Englishman laughed as if the thing were done already. And I was certain as Mayhew that Ten Yen would get this white man. I felt damned sure he'd get him. Then suddenly—I knew they were talking about me, and I was hot all over! I guess it took me a minute to wake up, to come to, to realize that *I* was the white man outside the Moon Gate—"

Crewe, tense, silent, leaned closer.

"I was in a tight corner. A man could hardly find a tighter corner. I tried to remember how much the rickshaw coolie could tell. I thought of the big Manchu and wondered how much he had seen. There was not the least doubt in my mind that Ten Yen would do just as he said. I knew it. And I had to get out at once without the slightest sound or I'd lose my life and the key! I had to get away on invisible feet—like the fog—as quietly as the fog. I had to keep a cool head—an iron nerve when every fiber of me was alive—quivering! Inch by inch I

did it; crawling over that wet iron, feeling for my own windowsill, putting my leg over, standing at last in my own room; dazed, chilled to the bone, but safe for the moment!"

Cecil Crewe drew a long breath as if he too had been making that slow perilous journey across a narrow balcony, high up in the Kowloon fog.

"And then—and then?"

"I didn't dare turn up my light—didn't dare close my window. One sound, you know, in my room and the game was up. But I dressed myself—somehow—feeling for my things—stepping around in the dark—stuffing clothes in my bag—getting my money. I put my suit on over my pajamas, then I opened the door and looked out. I knew their door might open any minute. I stood there looking at it, waiting; afraid to step out in the hall—afraid to breathe—afraid!" He took a deep breath and his puzzled eyes turned to Crewe. "I don't know what there was about those two in there—I don't know why I felt that way about'm. I'm not ashamed to tell you."

And Crewe nodded. He knew what there was about them. Even in the brief glimpse he had had of them—he had sensed it.

"Fog rolled in my window—sweat rolled down my back. Finally I tiptoed out—listening—looking back—but they didn't see me. I'm *sure* they didn't see me! The minute I reached the stairs I ran for it. The night clerk must have thought a half-dressed lunatic was standing there demanding the first boat out for Manila—"

Crewe could see him in his bare feet, his red hair on end, demanding a sailing at three o'clock in the morning. Nowhere but in the incurious Orient would such an action go unchallenged.

"There wasn't a liner at that hour," continued Neil, after a minute. "There was a Jap freighter loading. She took a few passengers and sailed at sunup. Sunup! The clerk didn't think much of white people who took Jap freighters—I didn't either, not after I got out on her. But all I could think of then was to get my feet and my key off the soil of China. Once on board I could lock my cabin door and snap my fingers at Ten Yen! And that was what I did. It was the only comfort I got out of that damned pitching freighter."

Crewe sat listening to the rapid, disjointed sentences. Winton's voice was full of an emotion that seemed to surge and fill this hot room. He sat thinking of the startling things he had heard—visibly affected by them, himself. Then suddenly he looked up.

"You must have seen them in the calesa, too? That's why I came in and found you so excited."

"Of course." Neil's face was a study. "But, Great Lord! Mr. Crewe, do *you* know them?"

"I don't know them," Crewe was carefully choosing his words, "but I know about Ten Yen. He's been playing fast and loose with my Government. When you left I followed their calesa to the Pasig—saw them go aboard a launch—it belonged to the same sailor who tried to do for you in the gate, Winton. You say you spoke to him?"

Neil flushed. "I asked the Chinaman in the launch if he knew a boat called the *Che Kiang*—but I bungled there—like a fool!"

"Ah?" said Crewe, who was beginning to feel a strong sense of responsibility. "And you overheard them say the *Che Kiang* was halfway to Manila—but she couldn't land without the key? That was three days ago. Of course they got the liner."

"Yes," said Neil wearily.

Crewe wiped away the sweat that was rolling down his face, and rose. Much was going to depend on his own keen judgment—quick wit—immediate decisions. He saw that.

"I take it the situation is like this. A man who was killed in Ten Yen's compound threw a key to you which apparently has great value. Ten Yen must have that key or his boat, the *Che Kiang,* can't land. God knows why. You were struck in the gate because you mentioned the *Che Kiang* to a Chinese sailor. All that's clear enough. The rickshaw coolie saw you board the Japanese freighter—of course. Well, there it is. Mayhew and Ten Yen will move heaven and earth to get the key—you know that. You know the danger too. But if I could emphasize that—I would. The danger, my dear fellow—is very great!" said Cecil Crewe earnestly. "You can't do this alone. I know the Orient—and I'm going to see you through."

"See here, Mr. Crewe—it's bad enough for me—"

But with a quick gesture, Crewe smiled.

"Nonsense! We won't discuss that—besides, we haven't time."

He glanced hurriedly around at the open wooden gratings—those Oriental devices which permit the egress of air and conversation. He had not heard a sound in the other room—nor in the corridor—and yet—! He remembered the loose lips and shifty eyes of the mestizo proprietor as he had seen him on several occasions lounging in the Mindora doorway. A man easily bought; and outside were Ten Yen and Mayhew ready and eager to buy him, and inside, watching him—depending on his judgment—stood Neil Winton! He looked at the open balcony—at the door with its big ineffectual lock—and almost instantly his mind was made up.

"Have you paid?—good. We must be getting out," he said hurriedly. "Do you know a rear exit, so we could leave without going through the office? You're not safe here. . . . Bag packed?"

"We could go out by the patio." Neil looked surprised, but he began picking up the last things from his washstand and dropping them into his bag.

"Don't hit your arm—watch it. Dr. John will see to it. You're fairly safe there. He's an American. Knows Malay dialects—understands the natives—knows the Walled City in and out. Good place. I'll take your overcoat—come!"

Neil snapped his bag shut, drew on one arm of his coat and let the other hang.

"Ready; I seem to be getting out of most places here in the Orient in a hurry," he said ruefully.

Crewe opened the door cautiously and peered into the long corridor—it was deserted. They stepped out quietly and closed the door. Open shell

windows along the side were protected from rain by the Mindora's widespreading eaves. At the far end of the corridor a narrow stairway led down to the servants' quarters. They stood there a moment —looking—listening. The Mindora's three wings faced in—and on this second floor the corridor was like a gallery. It overlooked the patio, a dimly lit square where trees and shrubbery tossed in the storm. They could see half a dozen Spaniards sipping frescas on the balcony of the right wing. The left wing seemed to be deserted with only long gleams of light shining on the tiled floors beneath bedroom doors. Directly in front of them, across the patio, stood the high blank rain-soaked rear wall.

"Come on," whispered Crewe.

Side by side they made their way down the corridor; the sound of their steps on the red Spanish tiles muffled by the drip-drip of water from the eaves. Reaching the narrow stairway, Crewe went first.

"It's slippery—be careful!"

They felt their way down in the dark. At last they were passing under the drenched trees and swaying branches in the patio. Crewe started toward the arched gate in the rear wall. He was hoping fervently that it was unlocked.

But the gate opened and a half-naked Filipino servant darted in. Crewe drew Neil behind the shrubbery; they stood perfectly still while the boy ran past them muttering—cursing the wind and the rain—far too occupied with his own woes to

observe the woes of others. They watched until the native was swallowed by an open doorway. In his haste the boy had left the wooden gate ajar. They stood there a minute longer. Guests of the hotel who slipped through the rear gate would be, as Crewe knew, immediately suspect!

The next instant they were outside—standing in an alley that was dark—odorous and muddy. Hugging the Mindora's wall, they hurried out to the open street. Crewe drew a long breath—he was as excited as a boy—

The wind came whipping along the pavement; a jagged streak of lightning tore across the sky, followed by a terrific thunderclap.

"We'll have to run for it," he cried.

"I forgot to ask you," panted Neil, as they raced along, "What does Ayudame mean?— Ayudame!"

Cecil Crewe half turned, but the wind caught the words out of his mouth.

## CHAPTER VIII

DR. JOHN NORTON, student of Malaysian dialects considered that day lost which did not produce the translation of at least one stubborn or obscure Malay phrase. His book, an exhaustive treatise in three volumes, was the fruit of twenty years research—in remote barrios—faraway islets—and wild mountain provinces in the Philippine Islands. It was a tremendous achievement! When he contemplated the piles of neat MSS. in his old Spanish chest the doctor would smile with pride, and wonder which one of the great publishing houses in England or the States could be trusted with such a treasure! He was an irascible man with a big heart, but not even the tropic calm had been able to subdue a nature essentially choleric and impatient. Bananas and saints, he often said, did not go together.

To-night he stood in the middle of his wide high-ceilinged sala and looked around it with jaundiced eyes. A valuable set of notes had been lost. He remembered jotting them down; remembered that they had solved a particular knotty problem; remembered his pride and triumph—oh, distinctly remembered his triumph! Then, where were they?

Angelo, his small Filipino servant watched him wide-eyed. Dr. John's stubby gray hair stood on end

above his sharp blue eyes. His crumpled white clothes were more disorderly than usual—two bright spots burned in the tropic pallor of his face. His limp, the result of an Insurrecto bullet, was very apparent as he stormed about the room. Pages of MSS. lay scattered wildly over a huge Bilibid table, books stood on end, a chair lay on its side. Angelo's eyes never left the distracted figure. At last the doctor halted in front of him.

"Well, they're gone!" sternly.

"Si, señor." Angelo would have assented to anything. "What iss gone?"

"My notes—writing—manuscripts." He lifted a page and struck it with his open palm. "*This*—idiot!"

Angelo shifted from one great bare foot to the other.

"Si, señor—I have not seen."

"You're a Filipino liar," grimly. "They were here on the table. I put them here before I went to Ah Sing's after tea. Now where are they? Have you been wrapping your mangy fish in them?"

"Oh, no—no, señor, I have not wrap nothing. I carry my fish in my hand—quite—quite—naked!" In his scanty white cotton union suit that reached to his knees, Angelo was not far from that primitive condition. He was sweating and close to tears. This *was dolorido.*

"They were on—they were on—now what the devil *did* I write those notes on?" Dr. Norton's eyes swept the table vacantly—retrospectively—while Angelo in an agony of apprehension waited, bring-

ing all his meager intellectual forces to bear upon the problem. Suddenly he smiled—a wide, gleeful smile.

"Ay-ee-e Dios! I, Angelo—I know. Gracias á Dios!"

"What do you know, you simpering fool?" But Angelo was gone, his brown legs twinkling over the polished floor. A distant door banged, then another. Full of wrath the doctor waited. Presently the bare feet came flying back and a breathless Angelo raced up to his master.

"See, señor—I, Angelo, have remember." He held out a shirt, tumbled, soiled—both cuffs covered with black cabalistic figures in the doctor's tiny neat handwriting.

Speechless, the doctor stared.

"Ay, gracias," whispered Angelo. "The señor clean his body before tea. I take away his shirt for the lavandera in the morning. If I haf not remember—ah, Dios—look!" He held up the cuffs. "Tomorrow all gone out—in the wash!"

Dr. Norton's wrath simmered and died in a sheepish expression. He looked at the shirt, he stared at Angelo, glowing with pride in front of him; then suddenly his fine head went back in a big laugh.

"Ha-ha-ha—" laughed the doctor.

"Hi-hi—" cackled Angelo.

And the usual perfect understanding being reestablished between them, the doctor took his precious notes to the table, and Angelo padded about straightening the room; then he curled up in a corner and went to sleep.

The sala was long, wide, full of comfortable wicker chairs, reading lamps, old pipes. Books were everywhere. Piled on shelves around the white-washed walls, on chairs and tables. The strangest room! Shell windows filling one side from floor to ceiling were pushed back and through the openings great ferns looked in, their fronds beckoning and seductive. The other three walls were broken by high carved doors leading to musty bedrooms. There was the great Spanish chest with brass locks; there were the rugless floors where wide mahogany boards held beautiful deep pools of light, and there was an odd tropical hominess about this queer house, one of the oldest built by an Illustrado in the Walled City.

The stairway at one end was a black well outlined Spanish fashion by carved railings. It plunged into immediate darkness—angled once—then dipped down into the passage under the house. The sala did not shut out the night. The sky, dark and stormy, looked in through the great opening; the ferns swayed, the wind blew splatters of rain upon the floor. There was the spluttering of the doctor's pen, an occasional light snore from Angelo, and the faint rustle of lizards on the walls hunting winged creatures driven in by the storm.

Then the great iron gates at the street entrance below clanged sharply. Dr. Norton looked up. It meant interruption. Footsteps hurried along the passage—he could hear voices. He raised his head, frowning.

"Angelo"—sharply—"see who it is." He hated being interrupted.

Angelo emerged from sleep and bounded to the stairway.

"Who iss it?" he called down.

"Is the doctor in?" asked a cool English voice.

"That's Crewe—" The doctor pushed away his papers, smiling. Exactly the person he wanted most to see.

But Crewe was not alone. Dr. Norton saw two men coming up the stairs and both of them looked wet, tired, troubled. The stalwart chap with Crewe was very white, his shoulders sagged and one coat sleeve hung empty. Was he hurt—ill—tropics—all three—what?—

"Come in—come in—" The doctor's outstretched hand was quick and nervous.

"Hello, Dr. John," said Crewe, "I've brought a friend—Mr. Winton—"

"Hello, Crewe—what's wrong with Mr. Winton?" Dr. John's sharp eyes looked him over. "Have you been hurt?"

Crewe looked seedy too. But he was high strung for the tropics. He took things hard—lived like a man perpetually on the trigger, and that was bad. It worried the doctor, because he was fond of Crewe. After all, the tropics took a heavy toll, and he often wondered how long Crewe could stand it?

"How do you do, sir?" said Neil Winton gravely, shaking the doctor's hand. Fatigue lay in heavy circles around his eyes and mouth. The doctor saw

it instantly. But he liked the firm upward curve of his lips, the dominant thrust of his square chin, and his red hair. A personality—a man of character, thought the doctor, and it was only later that he learned he was also a man of charm.

"Dr. John, Mr. Winton has been hurt," explained Crewe. "A Chinaman knifed him in the Spanish Gate. I happened to be smoking on the wall and saw it—but I think it's only a flesh wound."

"Knifed? That's strange." The doctor was surprised. "A Chinaman—did he get anything—did he get away?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, he did. Mr. Winton had gone down to the river and spoken casually to a Chinaman sitting there in a launch. Then when he turned to come back through the gate the Chinaman followed him. I saw it from the wall. He must have his arm dressed—I should have brought him sooner."

"Well, why didn't you?" It was a natural question but neither answered; both men looked embarrassed.

The doctor's sharp, puzzled eyes turned instantly to Neil.

"Don't you know that the Pasig at night down by the old walls is not a very safe place, Mr. Winton? All kinds of people come up the river." He helped Neil off with his coat. "Who bound this arm?"

"I did," said Crewe laconically.

Dr. John laughed.

"Anybody could see it was a novice."

Neil Winton frowned, and looked across at Crewe.

"You know, he isn't telling you everything."

"He wouldn't," said the doctor whimsically. "He's English; they never tell. But I suppose he saved your life. You're an American, Mr. Winton—from New York?"

"Yes; but I'm a Californian."

"Once a Californian—always a Californian," chuckled the doctor, as he began to unwind the handkerchief which had stuck to Neil's arm. The wound was in the fleshy part, above the elbow. It was deeper than the doctor had expected.

"By Jingo—that's an ugly cut." His fingers, cool, sensitive, probed along edges that were turning blue. "A nasty one. Angelo—" he called. "Angelo!"

The boy came running.

"Bring water; not hot—not cold—you understand? Not hot—not cold!"

"Oh, si—si—like chicken blood, when I kill."

"Precisely. And, Angelo, bring my kit." The doctor turned to Crewe. "You know how dumb these natives are?—Angelo will say 'si—si—señor,' and if I ask for the scissors I'm likely to get the ice-cream freezer. But he always brings something!" The doctor chuckled. "Mr. Winton, where are you stopping?"

"He's been at the Mindora—that God-awful place," said Crewe. "You know what it is. I wondered if you couldn't put him up for a day or so?" The dignified Englishman looked embarrassed.

"The truth is, I was so sure you would, that I told him to bring his bag—it's down on the landing."

The doctor's amused eyes turned to Neil.

"Well, now you see, Mr. Winton how informal we are. Every white man keeps an open house in the tropics. I'm delighted to have you—"

"That's awfully good of you. The Mindora *was* a wretched hole," said Neil gratefully.

"Yes—I know—" Just at this moment Angelo came hurrying in with a worn brown bag.

"Angelo," said the doctor, "this is Mr. Winton—he stays with us. Clean up the room next to mine."

Angelo's smile vanished.

"He lives?" looking pained.

"Certainly. Get the room ready." The doctor spread his kit open on the table.

The news shocked Angelo. He looked at Neil with open resentment.

"But, master—there iss no sheets!"

"No sheets—what did you do with them?"

Crewe lifted his amused eyebrows; he shrugged, motioned to Neil, and sat down on the arm of a chair.

"Me?" said the injured Angelo. "I do nothing. You take them to Jolo—they have not come back—no."

"I forgot. I gave them to the Datu for a present. Well, go down to Calle Real and get some. Angelo—the bed is good—but the net?" Worry leaped into the doctor's eyes. "The net—Angelo—the net?"

"Oh, si—" If mosquitoes ate up the unknown guest, it was a matter of indifference to Angelo.

Dr. John pushed away the MSS. on his table, and opened the brown bag which he had carried from Baguio to Mindanao, and even into the leper colony of Culión. He was giving this young man a chance to pull himself together. The doctor had lived too long in the tropics to ask many questions. Things happened here in the Orient; one accepted the most extraordinary events. They came—one endured—readjusted—went on. It was like living on a battlefield where life is a fight against disease, germs, dirt, and ignorance, and where the unusual happened more often than the usual. But he did wonder what had taken Winton down to the Pasig by the old wall, at night?

He began picking up various sharp and wicked little instruments from his brown kit.

"The natives think this is a magic box—they'll swallow anything—stand any punishment that comes out of my 'caja-santa.' They've even tried to steal it. Now, Mr. Winton—" His sharp blue eyes looked hard at Neil. "A few stitches, I think?"

"I know," grimly.

While he washed and dressed the wound, Angelo had inched closer. And as the shining needle pierced the flesh he hopped on one foot, and then the other. He stared—he scratched his left leg with his right big toe—he gaped at an operation more fascinating to him than a cockfight. While Dr. John worked deftly—rapidly—Neil winced; bit his lip, and turned his head away. Finally snipping the thread, Dr. John began to bind clean gauze around Neil's arm.

"Here—sit down. You'll be all right, in a day or two."

There had been a look of real solicitude in Crewe's eyes that had not escaped the doctor.

"If that knife was clean, Crewe, he'll escape infection. That's the only danger—" He wiped his needle. "You're an infernally healthy young man, Mr. Winton. It's refreshing to see a man in as good shape as you are." He glanced around, and there was Angelo's brown face almost at his elbow—"Angelo! Go and get the sheets!"

"But—she rains!" wailed Angelo.

His master's eyebrows shot up; one foot lifted itself with a significant gesture, and Angelo with a frightened squeak hurried down the steps and a moment later they heard the clang of the iron gate below.

Dr. John stood looking down thoughtfully.

"Crewe, get the brandy and soda—this lad needs it. I'm not sure but we all need it."

Crewe stepped to the cabinet for bottles, siphons, glasses. When he returned Dr. John's nervous slim fingers were replacing the instruments in his kit. Crewe saw his eyes dart little glances at Neil, lying hors de combat in the Hong Kong chair. Then he sent a sharp inquisitive look across the table at Crewe.

"That Chinaman—who followed Mr. Winton and knifed him in the gate—what about that, Crewe?"

It was like Dr. John. Forcible, direct, striking at the heart of things. Crewe had been expecting it. In

the thin resolute figure almost concealed by tumbled ill-fitting clothes, in the stern and caustic blue eyes that had looked at Death under so many different disguises, there lived an unusual man. Crewe knew some of the questions that must be puzzling him. But how much was it wise to tell? What special angles of the lane—the fog—the Kowloon night—should the doctor know?

With the doctor's eyes on him, Crewe hesitated.

"You said Mr. Winton spoke to the Chinaman. Well, what did he say?"

It was the same question Victory had asked!

"He inquired about a Chinese boat," said Crewe slowly.

"A boat—what boat?"

"The *Che Kiang.*" Crewe was pouring out the brandy. "Ever hear of her?" he added, looking up.

"No—I never heard of her. What is she—a freighter? Where does she come from?"

"Kowloon. She may be a freighter—I don't know."

Dr. John looked puzzled. "Well, what does Mr. Winton want to know about *her?*"

"Mr. Winton wants to know," said Crewe hurriedly, "When she'll be in—and what kind of cargo she carries. It's rather important."

"Can't he find out at the docks?"

"She's Chinese; not listed probably under the right name."

"O-oh." Dr. John lifted his eyebrows. "If she's *that* kind I'd better ask Ah Sing—he can tell me."

Crewe carefully poured the brandy and soda for Neil; then held it up to the light and studied its beaded amber.

"You can ask Ah Sing—if you want to," he said, "but I don't think I would—if I were you."

Dr. John's glass went down so sharply that it rang against the table.

"There's a damned lot of mystery here, Crewe."

"We're not going to keep you in the dark," Crewe was protesting, when Neil looked up.

"Nobody *could* keep you in the dark very long, sir—" he added. A sudden delightful smile lit his face and radiated in his eyes. Crewe saw he had a charm that was instantly disarming. His amused eyes watched its effect on Dr. John. Of course something must be told the doctor, but it required careful handling. He was loquacious—and then there was—the key!

"Dr. John—" He turned, but the doctor's untidy gray head was suddenly upreared, like the head of a dog that sniffs danger from afar. A gust of wind had swept in through the wide opening in the sala. It bent the ferns, scattered the doctor's papers, careened the books, and rattled the loose tiles on the roof.

"D'ye hear—that?"

Crewe, his glass suspended, listened. He did hear a queer note above the clash and clamor of the storm. Or was it his overactive imagination? When he looked around he saw Neil swallowing his liquor thirstily as if he needed it; and the doctor stooping to gather up the precious pages of his book. Crewe's

eyes traveled around the long room, heavy with shadows, filled with sensuous odors of the tropic night. He saw the lizards gleaming upon the wall—he heard the bamboo outside rubbing against the house—and the splash of rain on the tiled roof. He heard—or was it intuition that made him glance toward the stairway?

It lay in shadow except for a line of light along the beautiful carved railing. Rising out of the black well he saw a face—a woman's face. It hung there in the dusk a moment, luminous and ethereal like a white flower in a tropic night. He looked straight into eyes wide and dark, set under eyebrows curved like a Spanish arch. Black hair swept away from her white forehead and was lost in shadows, leaving the pale oval outline to shine like a cameo.

Crewe stood immovable by the long table. She was so lovely, so illusory—could she be real? He stared for another breathless instant, and then her lips parted, her eyes drooped. There was a little rustle—a whisper of silk and slowly—very slowly—Cecil Crewe set down his glass. It was merely luck that he found the table.

"A lady is here," he said quietly.

## CHAPTER IX

"A LADY, eh? Oh—como no!" The doctor stared at the slight black-gowned figure that stepped up slowly into the light.

"Buenas tardes, Señor Doctor." Her voice was so deep and rich that it was like the slow lapping of the Pasig under its little leashed bancas. And for a fraction of a second her dark eyes circled all three of their faces. Elena Delgarda! Nobody, at that moment, could have been less welcome to Dr. John. He looked from her to the young man who had been lying back wearily—oh, weary to exhaustion! The change was amazing! Winton sat upright in his chair, his startled brown eyes wide open and fixed upon the exquisite woman who had stepped out of the black well into life. Good Lord! thought the startled doctor. And when he glanced at Crewe, tall, quiet, composed, behind the table, he saw that Crewe's blue eyes were tense, and fixed as unalterably as Winton's upon the same person. And Crewe's hand, putting his glass down on the table, shook a little. Both young men had felt that swift leaping of pulse, that purely masculine emotion inspired by the sudden appearance of a lovely woman coming into the dim old room.

"Damn! Damn!" muttered the doctor profanely. To handle this situation he would need the wisdom and subtlety of a serpent.

"Ah—buenas tardes, Señora Delgarda," he said suavely, in Spanish as perfect as her own. But he barely touched the little extended hand. His speech was polite but formal, his eyes looked cold and unfriendly; as he glanced from Elena to the two young men, there was a quality of chagrin about his mouth. It was the very devil that they should have met her here!

"I dine at the Spanish Club, so I find myself near your casa, Señor Doctor. But you are busy?—occupado?—I can talk to you for one moment onlee?" It was charming the way she gazed up into his face; her head on one side, her curving eyebrows lifted; a deferential note in her voice. Charming, the soft pallor of her skin, the big black eyes with their curious twist of expression, the extreme grace of her body that moved with the rhythm of Spain. Very, very charming, said the doctor under his breath along with other and stronger things.

"Certainly, certainly—" Embarrassment was making him more brusque than usual. "Señora Delgarda, may I present Mr. Crewe, of London, and Mr. Winton, of California?" He watched her dark eyes travel slowly over the blond Englishman who bowed, then pass to the younger, closer-knit Winton, with his alert, well-shaped head and his white bandaged arm.

"Ah, si—si—Cal-i-for-nia—but I love to see it. It is of Spain!" she drawled the long word with a round distinctness, until the syllables that meant home and country to a young man far away from both sounded as if they had been caressed. Dr. John

recognized it as an almost fatal stroke! Probably she was the loveliest woman young Winton ever had seen. No doubt, of course, she was. Certainly she was the loveliest among the world of delicate, bijou women in Manila. Behind the tall lamp he could see Crewe, motionless, watching her with an almost hypnotic gaze. The vexed expression on the doctor's face deepened; inwardly he was raging. He had seen men go down under the battery of those alluring glances before—many men.

"Won't you sit down, Elena?" he said, resignedly, drawing up a chair.

"Gracias, Señor Doctor—" She dropped into it with a graceful movement. "It is veree warm—" touching her forehead with a wisp of embroidery. Perfume, soft, subtle, insinuating, carried intimations of something mysterious that had come into the room with her.

"Sit down!— Sit down!" said the doctor testily, to the two young men standing as if transfixed.

Elena turned her dark head to smile at them both. Then opening her black fan that sparkled with silver ornaments, she languidly waved it back and forth. Her hands were ringless, white, and finely wrought. There were sparkling buckles on her high-heeled black slippers, but no other touch of light or color about her, except her lips—red as hibiscus buds. Extraordinary—the power of Elena's beauty. From the extreme edge of his chair, the doctor watched her; from under her curving eyebrows, Elena's black eyes politely measured him.

"It's Angelo—of course," he sighed.

"Si—Angelo sends no money, and all his familee go hongry—" She spread dramatic palms. "For six weeks he has not come to see his madre Paula—not a word—not a peseta—Paula can do nothing—onlee cry. She waits—down in the calesa." Dr. John moved impatiently.

"Angelo!" he called. "Angelo—aqui—come here!" but there was not a sound. "Angelo!" Elena, waving her fan, sent her critical amused eyes around the room.

"You see?" The doctor sat back in his chair with gusty relief in his voice. "He is not here!"

"He *was* here, sir," smiled Neil Winton. "Only a moment ago—I saw him stop in the doorway with the sheets, but when he saw the Señora Delgarda he whisked away like a cat."

Elena fixed Dr. John with reproachful glance.

"You see, Señor Doctor—" her fan pointed the fact—"how you are bad for him. And now Paula will cry—like the falls at Pagsanjan, she will cry. What does he do with his money—that Angelo?"

"Cockfights, I'm afraid. Too many cockfights," said the doctor ruefully, "and the fiesta at Malate. But then, he's only a boy."

"Onlee a boy!" Elena's face hardened. "When there are one-two-three-four-five—" she counted them on her fingers—"brothers and sisters in Paco, with Angelo the onlee one to be working. Cockfights— Dios! Fiestas—bah!" Her fan clicked shut.

"You're right. I'll speak to him, Elena. To-morrow is his payday, and Paula shall have every peso,

I promise it. Angelo must retrench for a month." A slow, satisfied smile showed the tips of Elena's white teeth.

"Gracias, Señor Doctor. What you have promise —it iss already done." She rose. Her eyes rested for a moment on Cecil Crewe. A new señor, an English señor, who had made no effort to talk to her, and therefore roused her curiosity. He had risen when she did. Always reticent, there was a tenseness in Crewe's composure that stirred a vague disquiet in Dr. John. Elena's effect on Winton had been different. His face was flushed, his eyes danced with interest and admiration.

And Elena saw it; she lingered; her indolent glance roamed over Winton's smooth red hair, his smooth clear skin—

"You stay in Manila long, Señor Winton?"

"Señora Delgarda—can you doubt it—now?" quick as a flash.

"Como no?" laughed Elena. "You stay one boat—two boats—three boats?" lightly. "But you must not miss too many boats, like el Señor Doctor."

"Three boats, at least. I could not know you in less time, señora," daringly. "I'm staying with the doctor."

Crewe moved restlessly, but the doctor's little blue eyes snapped. By jingo! he thought, you never can tell! Such a serious lad he seemed when he came up the stairs. Now who would have dreamed that he would be the devil with the ladies?

"Si-i-i—" drawled Elena, the upward inflection an ascending melody. "But I think you simpatico—

Then you will have tea with me, you and Señor Doctor—and perhaps—" a sidelong glance—"the so silent Señor Crewe. And we shall have Angelo to visit with his madre, Paula." She laughed wickedly at the doctor's dismayed face.

"Señora"—Neil's eyes sparkled, he bowed—"the boat does not sail that could take me away from that tea." Elena laid her fan against her red lips.

"My house is on the Pasig. It is veree old, veree triste, I do not like it—no."

"What does it mean—Pasig?" asked Neil curiously.

"It iss Ilocano—I think—I am not sure. But it has many meanings. The natives say the water sings—'I am happy to meet with you.' You see, it iss the life stream of our Islands. Everything flows into it, everything follows it, even the so small esteros, they find it at last." Her voice was very earnest and touched with poetry—her lovely Spanish face grave—but the doctor shattered her airy fancies ruthlessly.

"Yes, and the Filipinos bathe in it—wash their clothes and carabaos in it—drink it—die in it." She looked at him reproachfully.

"And why not?— It iss beautiful, our Pasig." She turned to Crewe. "And you, señor—you are at the British Club?"

"No—I live in the Walled City. In the Delgarda house on Calle Linda. Are you a member of that family, señora?" Elena stepped back, her big eyes perplexed, amazed, staring at him.

"In the Delgarda Casa?—but that iss *my* house!"

She looked at the doctor—"It iss a mistake—si?" Dr. John shook his head. He was worried, embarrassed; he wished Elena would go. He hadn't expected this phase to come up.

"Do you mean, Señor Doctor, that there iss someone in it? Paying for it? No, no—the Delgardas do not put 'Alquilar' upon *their* casas." Her slight figure was drawn up. "Impossible!"

"It's true, Elena," said Dr. John dryly. "Delgarda *has* let the casa. He needed money. He's always needing money," dryly. "My friend Crewe needed a home—como no?"

"Señor Crewe—" Elena looked up at the tall Englishman—"you! Her cheeks were scarlet; for a moment she stood there, her fan tapping her finger nails. "Ah—que profanacion!" There was a desolate wail in her low voice, and Dr. John knew that more than the renting of her house distressed Elena.

"Ay de mi—I do not like it—no!" Before any one of the three could speak, she had turned and darted down the dark well of the stairs; they could hear the clack-clack of her high heels on the steps; quick Spanish exclamations followed, then the crunch of small hoofs, and the rattle of a calesa as it sped away from the passage into the street. Not until the clatter had entirely died away did one of the three men speak; then Crewe turned hurriedly to the doctor.

"I say, do you mean her house has been let, and she didn't know it? I don't like it. That's a rotten thing."

"By jingo!" With a gesture of dismay, Dr. John dropped into a chair and fanned himself with his manuscript. "She's like a tropical storm, isn't she? Always dramatic, never doing anything halfway, always extreme. Sit down, Crewe, have a cigarette. I'll give this young man just five minutes to get to bed—doctor's orders."

"Go to bed? I guess not! I'm going to hear about the señora!" protested Neil. "Lord! she's superb—exotic—why she's—"

"Sit down!" snapped Dr. John. "Don't try to explain her, for God's sake! I sat up once all night with a man who did that. Nobody can explain Elena!" He took up his odd Filipino pipe, filled it, and puffed silently. Then he glanced over at Crewe, who was looking at him questioningly.

"It wasn't exactly a rotten thing—" the doctor sighed. "She and Delgarda haven't lived together for a year. He's been staying in your house, Crewe, the Delgarda Casa—but she's been living up the river in the old hacienda where she was born. She calls it triste—well, it is."

"D'ye mean they're divorced, or simply can't hit it off?" Crewe's deep gaze was on his face.

"Spanish women are not divorced. And she's a Catholic. Women of the Spanish aristocracy do not leave their husbands. It is not 'costumbre.' Spanish society does not recognize Elena; of course, you must remember we do not move fast in the Islands. With Delgarda it's been gambling—women—wine. Elena has stood a great deal. There's not another woman in Manila as attractive to men as she is. He

inhaled quietly, watching the pale fringe drift toward the ferns, in the open end of the sala, where the sky, filled with a gusty aftermath of storm, looked in. Winton sat hunched up in his long chair, his face bright with interest. Crewe feigned abstraction, and Dr. John, who had never liked Elena, began to feel a little sorry for her—as he explained her.

"Lord!" he said suddenly, "but it's hard on women! Elena has been like an orchid behind a plate-glass window. Every man who looked in wanted her, and the one who had her wanted every other woman."

"Where's Delgarda now?" asked Crewe, looking up.

"At his hacienda, down in the country. You needn't be surprised at her feeling for the house, Crewe. She's Delgarda, of a remote line, herself. Pure Spanish, not a drop of mestizo—and that's rare in the Islands. It was a great Spanish casa once, but there's no one to restore it. Elena has no children. Like a good many others here, they're the tag end of an old family." He knocked his ashes on the table. Neil rose. Dr. John got up too.

"By George—it's pathetic—romantic! Well, I'm going to bed. I suppose I'll see you in the morning, Crewe?"

"As early as possible, but don't hurry to get up, old man. You look rather done in. I'm going to hunt up the *Che Kiang*."

"That Chinese boat!" Dr. John's eyes under his

bushy eyebrows were turned to Crewe. "But you started to tell me about that!"

Crewe looked at Neil Winton—he nodded—

"That's a long story, sir. Crewe can tell it, if he will. I'm all in. Good night. What did she call it—buenas noches." Neil Winton was smiling to himself as he went out.

"Buenas noches, by jingo!" chuckled the doctor, "he's trying to say good night. Now what's all this mystery, Crewe?"

He leaned forward in his chair, oblivious to the conjugation of the Visayan verb, his manuscript forgotten on the table. With his tousled hair and bright restless eyes he reminded Crewe of a particularly keen Scottish terrier. And so—while the storm outside blew with abated fury, and the mosquitoes around the lamp buzzed in the hot air—Cecil Crewe told him the story of the dark lane and the old Chinese compound in Kowloon; the white hands over the wall, the box, and the key!

## CHAPTER X

A HEAVY smell of wet tropical foliage mingled in Calle Linda the next morning along with the clean salt tang of the sea. The long line of the Delgarda house cast a heavy shadow down the street. Under the early sun, its eroded stone blocks, turning ivory and pinkish gray, made a fine piece of color. The massive black iron gates at the street entrance to the passage were tightly closed; the rust-red tiles of the roofs, the heavily barred window slits in the lower story, the great shell casements that ran the length of the upper one, and overhung the street, made the house look aloof and secretive. And well it might. Nowhere in the Walled City was there a casa of such varied yet proud traditions.

At the left of the passage, steps went up into a small stone room long ago used to house the guard. Recently it had been taken by Pilar the Filipina embroiderer for her shop. There were those who said it was not safe to trust her immortal soul where Satan made such frequent visitations. But Pilar only laughed, snapping her fingers, going her way.

"If your thoughts are always amiable, my daughter," Padre Esteban had told her, "not even in Casa Delgarda can Satan touch you."

Pilar loved her little tienda, so cool and shadowy. She was proud of the enormous pile that stretched above and behind her to the big neglected patio. She considered it bien to live under the roof of a family importante like the Delgardas! While the rice in her charcoal pot bubbled, and the silver bodies of tiny fish waiting to be cooked gleamed from a bench in the corner, Pilar brushed her uneven stone floor with a cocoa fiber broom, and sang in a high clear voice—"Toma esta flor-le dije a una paloma"—the folksong of her native barrio of Parañaque.

From her cage in the shadow, Zorita, Pilar's bleeding heart dove, chirped hungrily, then tried to reach a long branch of lavender orchid that hung in the window. Pilar leaned on her broom and shook a reproachful finger.

"Have shame, Zorita! Pilar hass not said an Ave yet."

A candle threw a wavering light upon the Virgin set in her niche. The Virgin of the Pillar, a plaster saint in scarlet and blue robes. Pilar knelt reverently before her shrine, crossing herself, then the beads of her rosary slipped through her fingers. When she rose she stood listening with bent head a moment, to the great bells of Santa Maria ringing for early mass. So many churches there were in the Walled City—so many prayers ascending to the Virgin—so many bells to be always ringing.

"Hola—Pilar!" That was Vicente from the patio. Pilar wheeled, her brown face lost its half-

mystical look, she snatched a glance at a small hanging mirror. "Un momento—!"

Vicente was cook to the English family renting the casa. Pilar caught up Zorita's wicker cage and hurried down the passage. In the patio, on the edge of the old stone fountain, Vicente sat eating a papaya. Pilar took it from him, shared it with Zorita, put the cage by the water, and sat down.

"You eat too much," she said calmly. Vicente smiled; Pilar could say anything she liked to him.

"Where iss the señorita?" She glanced up at the wide, tiled balcony that overlooked the patio. Vicente shrugged.

"For half an hour the mangoes freeze their hearts on the ice—and still the English stretch under their nets—and up there on the balcony the table iss already laid for breakfast." Pilar laughed.

"Poor Vicente! How you are a slave to be cook and house-boy at once!"

"Si"—petulantly—"and me—the best house-boy in Manila, to be cooking. Only for the pesos would I do it."

"I think—soon, maybe, the English go to the Mountain Province."

Vicente looked alarmed. "Your tongue runs too fast, Pilar. And me—out again at San Juan with no pesos for the rice—" He leaned closer. "Listen—they will not go! They stay here—secreto—waiting for someone. I—Vicente—have listen—" Pilar drew back shocked.

"Have shame! How you are bad, Vicente!" Her

bright eyes, so like Zorita's, considered him a moment. Then she moved closer to him. "And what did you hear, Vicente—si?"

"Mucho!" Vicente's sharp brown face was mysterious. "The señor, he writes on his little piano with the long black fingers that goes tic-tac—like a million geckos—far into the night he writes, Pilar."

She nodded her head wisely.

"Si—so much there iss in his head, Vicente, he must get it out—or it iss sick."

"Si—" Vicente was skeptical. "Since the fiesta of Malate which iss two weeks, they have been here, Pilar, yet there are no visitors to the casa but the Señor Doctor. Why iss that?" Pilar giggled.

"The Señor Doctor iss simpatico, Vicente—much I like him, and Angelo—"

"Psst! Angelo! A bobo!" Vicente scowled jealously. Pilar shot a glance at him from the corner of her black eye.

"He brings me a new rosary from the fiesta, Vicente. I show it to you?—"

"No!"—violently—" I break it—so—and so—" His big hands were eloquent. Pilar was horrified.

"Que malo! To break a rosary!" She sidled a little closer to him. "In the Escolta, Vicente, in the shop of Fernando, iss a string of beads, long, like an orchid stem—and red! Like—like Zorita's heart!"

"And what iss that to me?" said Vicente stonily.

"Nothing," sighed Pilar.

"Angelo—he gets them for you," suggested Vi-

cente. Pilar snuggled her warm brown hand into his, and gazed innocently up at the mango tree. Vicente glanced at her, brushed his bare toes across the broken tiles of the fountain, then capitulated, as man has done since the first woman coaxed a gift from the first reluctant male.

"Bueno—when the Señor Crewe pays me—I get them for you."

Pilar broke into a soft triumphant laugh; butterfly fingers touched his cheek, and Vicente smiled.

"They are more bonito than the rosary?" eagerly.

"Oh, si—si, they are beau-ti-ful—like the green ones of the Señorita Victory." She drawled the lovely name with so much awe in her tone that Vicente laughed.

"Soon you will be saying an Ave to her," he jeered.

"Como no?" stoutly." She iss pink and white like Santa Barbara—and how she smells good, Vicente. And her clothes all silk, and her little hands—I shall cut my hairs just like hers—si."

Vicente looked at the blue-black hair wound round and round her shapely little head.

"You will look like a monkey."

"If I look like a monkey," Pilar shrugged, unoffended, "then I do not cut my hairs. How long does the Señor Crewe stay in Manila, Vicente? I like it if the Señorita Victory live here always."

"Live here—in the casa of the Delgardas? In the casa of an Illustrado?" shrilly. "Impossible!" Vicente's black eyes traveled over the great house, with its twin wings spreading back to the rear wall

of the patio, its noble crumbling staircase, its rust-red tiles, so warm and mellow against the vividly blue sky. Then his gaze dropped to the deep dark arches of the cloistered passage under the balcony. Shrubbery smothered the bases and crept across the sunken tiles to the walls; gigantic cobwebs, jeweled with raindrops, hung in the gaunt openings. There were many doors along this passage, leading to rooms which had housed the great retinue of Delgarda servants. Behind these rooms were winding corridors which Vicente eyed suspiciously, but never entered in the night-time. He crossed himself when he peered down their dusty lengths. So many servants had run swiftly to serve their masters from these corridors. So many great señores had called from the sala and the patio—and now there was no one but himself and Pilar, with white strangers in the lofty rooms above, and the Delgarda treasures scattered—one by one. "Que profanacion!" muttered Vicente.

"But they are rich, Vicente," said Pilar, who was more practical, "el señor and his sister."

"Si." Vicente's eyes came back to Pilar. "Si"—after a hasty glance at the empty balcony, he dropped his voice—"and the Señor Crewe hass many letters, Pilar. I—Vicente—have look carefully at them. They come from China, and fasten themselves with red wax!"

"Red wax?" Pilar's eyes widened. A quick step sounded on the balcony.

"Vicente!" called a voice. The house-boy sprang

to his feet and scurried up the stone stairway leading to the upper floors. Pilar, with a little giggle, watched him go.

"Good morning, Pilar!"

"Good morning, señorita!" Pilar's beauty-loving eyes saw every detail of the charming person who leaned from the balcony. Nowhere was there such another face. "It iss a be-u-ti-ful day!"

"Did you know the typhoon signal was flying? And there isn't a cloud in the sky!"

"Si—but it iss onlee Number Two. He iss far out on the water, he does not scream—yet!"

"Does he scream, Pilar?" Victory was awed.

"Oh, si—si—like millions of cats!" spreading her brown hands with relish. Another voice, deep, mellow, came from somewhere in the house. That was the señor! Pilar caught up Zorita's cage. She stood for a moment against the fountain, poised, ready for instant flight. The hot sun glistened on her black head, the breeze fluttered her huge pineapple fiber sleeves. When the señor appeared—then it was different. Little Pilar vanished in the dark passage under the house.

Vicente, pattering along the balcony, from the corner of his eye, watched her go. He was bringing a platter of mangoes and fresh water for the tea. He looked anxiously at the small table laid where swinging air plants threw cool shadows. This was a very particular señorita. She had an all-seeing eye, like one of the saints. Never before in his experience as house-boy had Vicente skated the floors so thoroughly, or been so careful with his dusting. He

glanced at the señorita, beside the breakfast table; cool and lovely she was—si. But nothing escaped her. *How* they were clean—these English.

"Is the señor dressed, Vicente?"

"Si, señorita." Vicente cocked his head. "I hear him now, in the sala." Victory had not heard Cecil come out of his bedroom, but the Filipino boy had ears like the jungle things.

"Oh, Vicente—what wonderful mangoes!" Their elongated gold cups, of incredibly fine texture, lay on an old blue platter. As Vicente put them down she caught their perfume, so strange, so subtle it always made her think of tropical moonlight—roses—lovers! Lovers! Where in this old Walled City was there a lover?

"Victory!" It was Cecil from the sala. "Come here, please!"

The sala was long, dim, and that first instant away from the tropic sun was always a little blurred. Then at a far corner, over by the desk, she saw him standing and reading his letters. Victory went up and patted his arm.

"Mornin', darling—you came in frightfully late—didn't you? Did Dr. John put Mr. Winton up? How's his arm?" Tucking a friendly hand under his arm, she looked up into his face. "Well, after a hard night, *you're* looking very fit!" It seemed to her that his face was unusually alive; he looked less fagged than he had at any time since they came.

Crewe's smile and glance were brief. He held an unopened letter in his hand, and she watched him turning it nervously in his fingers.

"It's a heavenly day—and the mangoes are perfect. Pilar says the typhoon signal's up—but I don't believe her. Come on out now, while it's cool—you know how grilling it will be later," she coaxed.

"The mangoes can wait," he said rather shortly. "This is a letter from Eric, Victory—but I haven't read it yet. Tell Vicente breakfast must wait—for a little while—I've something very important to tell you."

## CHAPTER XI

"VICTORY," said Crewe an hour later, "have Vicente bring some fresh tea; yours is quite cold."

But she didn't hear him. Her chin was cupped in her hand, her eyes, bluer than Manila Bay, were fastened on him. He had never seen her more absorbed in anything, than in this recital, begun in the sala, and ended at the breakfast table on the balcony.

"What *would* have happened if Ten Yen had seen him, Cecil?" she suggested. "I wonder how he felt, out on that balcony?"

"Well, you'll have a chance to find out," said Crewe rising, "you can ask him." He looked at her and smiled. She was excited, glowing. He could see how completely Neil's adventure had captured her imagination. His odd, high-spirited little sister!

"Cecil, what *could* that lovely old key unlock?"

"Winton came all the way to Manila to find that out. I have a theory or two myself." He lit his cigarette and stared down at the mango tree in the patio. Of course, he had thought of little else. Winton's story had been revolving in his mind ever since he heard it. And he was afraid that Winton was not really alive to his own danger.

"But what a sporting thing for him to do!" Vic-

tory's voice was vibrant. "I want to meet him. And I simply *must* see that key!" Crewe looked down at her suddenly and laughed. There was the eager feminine curiosity; where he had been wondering about the *Che Kiang,* and the man killed in the compound, her mind flew instantly to the key. He started down the steps.

"I must post this letter to Eric, and find out about the boat to Singapore before it gets any hotter. And, Victory—he glanced back over his shoulder—"I'm stopping at Dr. John's to see Winton, on my way home."

"M-hm—" said Victory absently. "Bye—"

She sat on beside the empty breakfast table, her eyes remote. She was completely withdrawn. She was following that solitary rickshaw which had moved down the long lane that ended in the Moon Gate, How well she knew the background! The Hong Kong bay—the Peak—the Kowloon hills—the risks! Hotel and fog-swept balcony—she knew these too! Her vivid imagination supplied details where Cecil had sketched high lights. His clipped incisive speech had told too little; she wanted to know much more! How would it end; what new turn would it take? She could see that Cecil meant to stay on here and help—that he was keen about it. But it was a strange chance which had brought Mr. Winton to stand with Cecil against Ten Yen!

The sun sent long rays across the dull red tiles of the balcony. Hot steam rose from the patio. She began to feel the familiar pressure on her head of tropic midday. Downstairs, Pilar in her tienda was

singing; upstairs, Vicente, with waxed cloths bound around his feet, was "skating the floor" swaying to a rhythm of his own, dexterously cutting figures at the corners; skating up and down, and back and forth, until the mahogany boards gleamed like glass. Then, in the passage, Victory heard the rattle of a calesa!

That wide dark corridor under the house had once echoed to the clatter of innumerable small hoofs, and at the far end of the patio were rows of stalls where the Delgarda horses had been stabled. But she and Cecil always dismissed their cochero at the entrance gates. So this must be a stranger.

The calesa stopped! She heard the click of high heels on the flagstones. Victory pushed aside the ferns and looked over.

She never forgot what she saw! A slim shaft of a girl dressed in thin black, standing against the mottled wall and looking up into the y'lang-y'lang tree. She held her hat in her hand; the sun glistened on her blue-black hair; and she glanced leisurely about the patio, every flower, vine, shrub, passing under her seaching gaze. Then she came back to the y'lang-y'lang tree, with its bare gray branches like little gloved fingers, and its thick yellow flowers. Breaking one off, she thrust it into her girdle. It was a careless, significant gesture. Y'lang-y'lang belonged to her, and she belonged to the tropics. She looked about with a subtle air of possession which Victory began to resent. Then she stepped into the path leading to the staircase.

From behind the ferns Victory's curious eyes

watched her slow passage up the stairs. Who was she? She walked with the ease and grace of a native woman trained to carry water on her head. By the time she reached the top step, Victory was on her feet.

"I am the Señora Elena Delgarda." Her dark eyes wandered over the scattered Crewe belongings. There were the pile of English magazines, the inlaid stool Victory had brought out from the sala to hold her sewing, the cheap Hong Kong chair Cecil found in Binondo; they were frankly critical, appraising eyes. "You are the Señorita Crewe? Ah, si—last night I meet your brother." The señora considered that meeting of no moment; her indifferent shrug said so.

Victory stiffened. Odd that Cecil hadn't mentioned it! How could he have met a girl as beautiful as this one without speaking about it?

"Will you sit down, señora?"

"Gracias, señorita." Ignoring the wicker chairs on the balcony, the señora walked deliberately past Victory into the sala, and seated herself in one of its high carved chairs. Astonished, affronted, but forced to follow her, Victory hesitated. If this really were the Señora Delgarda, perhaps she had better hear why she had come. She sat down on a hard little couch opposite her.

Turning her head the señora looked as if she were prepared to hold an audience. She was aloof, serene, and after she had watched her in silence a moment, Victory's eyes began to gleam. She sat, quietly waiting for the señora to explain, but as she looked

across at the delicately oval face, she wondered if the Spanish girl intended to be unpleasant?

Opening her fan, the señora gazed with perfect self-possession at the Delgarda portraits, and the Spanish furniture. Then the fan pointed out a bad-tempered grande dame on the wall—

"She—that one—what iss it you say in English? Ah—si—she would turn upside down in her tomba—if she knew."

Why would she? Victory wondered.

"Gracias á Dios—she does not know," said the señora, looking straight at Victory. "But I—Elena Delgarda—I know. There iss in the casa a box—it iss—what you say?—si—for jewelry." Her little accent was delicious. "It iss of silver—it hass a crest—veree small. I take it—si—"

In Victory's bedroom a large mirror in a heavily gilded frame hung over a long narrow table draped in red velvet with white linen coverings. It was here that she kept the silver box of heavy repousse work with the Delgarda crest. Every time she put back her string of pearls at night, or got out her rings in the morning, she thought what a particular ducky box it was, and how much she would like to buy it and take it home. This nice old thing was what the señora proposed to take away.

"It belongs to the Señor Delgarda," said Victory crisply.

"Si," a careless wave of the fan—"it iss better I take it." Her tone indicated that the box was much safer in her possession than in the hands of these English strangers.

She was quite impossible, this girl; Victory looked her up and down.

"It is hard for me to believe that you are really the Señora Delgarda," she began. But just then Vicente, on the balcony, passed the sala door.

"Vicente, come here," called Victory.

Vicente, who was bringing a vase of y'lang-y'lang, stood like a brown statue when he saw the señora. "Dios!" he muttered. The señora turned on him, loosing a flood of sibilant Spanish. And Victory sat there, amazed at Vicente's sudden, abject servility. He scarcely lifted his eyes; he looked as if he might drop to the floor and let those small buckled slippers on the señora's feet stamp on him.

"Vicente, who *is* this person?"

"But all Manila knows the Señora Delgarda," said Vicente proudly, "she own the casa." Dr. Norton, who made the arrangements about the house with Cecil, had said nothing about a señora—he only mentioned the Señor Delgarda. Victory glanced at the Spanish girl sitting so calmly in her chair.

"Vicente, this person says she has come for the silver box on my dressing table. Does it belong to her?"

"Oh, si—señorita—it iss hers!" Vicente glanced at his señora, and quite suddenly she smiled, a dazzling, brilliant smile that infuriated Victory.

"Get the box, Vicente. Put the things on my dressing table." Vicente hurried away and the two women faced each other. The señora's eyes shifted from Victory's bobbed hair to the broad toes of her

little white walking shoes. They said the presence of this English stranger here in the Delgarda Casa was an affront.

Victory had grown remote. She looked at the señora, studying her from a great distance. She saw her exquisite finish—her pride—her vanity. A most unpleasant person; her beauty was not enough. And when Vicente returned with the silver box Victory moved with a curt little gesture.

"Give it to your señora!" She watched the Spanish girl take the box, examine it thoroughly, lock it, and put the key in her little silver purse.

"Never before hass anyone live in the Delgarda house—for money—no—" announced the señora.

"It is a pity," said Victory, "that the Delgarda poverty requires it."

"Nor do the Delgardas live in other peoples' houses—for money—no—" drawled the señora, rising.

"Is it—because the Delgardas cannot pay for them?" suggested Victory.

"Dios!" The black brows caught together. "Que insulto! I go!"

Victory drew back; she saw the Señora through an angry mist; her self-control was slipping. It was intolerable that this girl should come here and be so rude.

"Vicente, show your señora out!" said Victory. Elena turned, her eyes flashed, she started to speak, but paused, then hurriedly handed the jewel box to Vicente.

"Ah—que importe!" she cried. "My calesa, Vicente."

"Vicente—" began Victory, then stopped. Of course the Filipino would obey his señora. To forbid him would bring humiliation to her. If it had been Pilar, but Vicente—no! The Delgarda family shrine was the one he worshipped. She stood and watched the señora's straight back march out of the room, with Vicente moving servilely behind her. The little wretch! He, and his señora! She would discharge him! Victory stood still, listening, and the calesa had rattled out of the passage before she moved.

Her first impulse was to pack her clothes and go to the Manila Hotel at once. But, of course, she couldn't! Cecil wanted to keep away from the British and Polo clubs—and the hotels. She was dripping wet! She hadn't been so angry since she saw her Chinese cook torture a kitten. Damn that Spanish girl! Victory lit a cigarette with trembling fingers, and her white shoes took her up and down the glassy floor. She looked around the long high room with its Delgarda portraits, its carved doors and opalescent windows. It looked different! It looked like a room where people lived who had more pride than heart. It was a cold room! Whatever made her think it had glamour when it was so Latin—all Latin! Suddenly she paused by the long old table in the middle. She had just remembered the Spanish girl's shrug when she spoke of meeting Cecil. Victory's face stiffened, hardened; her eyes were frozen bits of blue. What insolence! When Cecil hadn't even *mentioned* meeting her! She lifted

a tiny wooden saint from the table and stared at it absently; she was thinking hard. A question, swift as an electric shock, and as startling, ran through her. Why *hadn't* Cecil told her? Where had he met this girl? How long had he known her? Her eyes fell on the carving in her hand—another Delgarda possession! She let it fall as if it stung her! How rotten of Cecil! It was so unlike him! He had such a nice sense of humor, and here was exactly the right person to exercise it on—but he hadn't said a word! She would tell Cecil what she thought about it the moment he came in. She glanced at her watch; her mood demanded action. And there was Dr. John, he knew these wretched Spaniards—why hadn't he said something? Everybody had conspired to keep her in the dark—she was furious at them all—she would go to Dr. John's. She must talk to somebody at once!

She threw away her cigarette, hurried into the bedroom; but as she crossed the sala she looked full at the bad-tempered lady with the thin nose, black hair and pinched-in waist, who hung on the wall. "You Spaniards are all rotters!"

She pulled her hat from the aparador, and caught up her parasol; the heap of homeless jewelry on her dressing table filled her with a fresh sense of outrage. She swept it into the drawer and went out on the balcony. The heat rushed into her face, but she walked swiftly down the steps, through the patio, into the wide gloomy passage, and closed the outside gates with a sharp little click. In her spirit, Victory was through with Delgarda Casa. She had

entirely forgotten that she had promised Pilar to go to the Church of Santa Maria.

Pilar had not forgotten. Hurrying to the door of her dim tienda, she looked after her disconsolately. Then she walked out into the patio, hunting Vicente.

"Vicente—hola!" The house-boy bobbed cautiously from behind a tree, then seeing a clear field before him he sauntered with sudden suspicious leisure to the fountain and sat down on the wide rim, curled from generations of sitting house-boys like a shell.

"Vicente, the señorita hass gone," said Pilar sorrowfully. "How I wass hurry to go with her—and now—she hass forgot me."

"Si—she hass gone." There was a peculiar light in Vicente's eyes. "But she will come back."

"We were to go to Santa Maria to see my nam-sec-our blessed Lady of the Pillar, Vicente," explained Pilar, still hurt and disappointed. "She it iss who brings me the bien fortune—"

Vicente leaned closer. "Pilar, do you remember the Señora Lottie—who lives in General Luna? She hass one white cat, with blue eyes, one black cat that put up its back and go 'Psst-psst!' at the white cat! Abá-a—" Vicente slipped to the ground and illustrated on all fours. Pilar watched him in disgust.

"Bobo! Si—I remember! Ave Maria, how they fight—those gatos! Why, Vicente?"

"Hi-hi-hi—" chuckled Vicente. "Nothing, Pilar—oh, Jesú Maria—nothing!"

## CHAPTER XII

CECIL CREWE stepped into a calesa. At this hour in the morning the street was full of tropic glare; it was too hot to walk. His mind was full of the story he had been telling Victory up in the sala. Twice now, he had told it. Last night at the doctor's, and again this morning. Each time it seemed to stand out sharper, clearer, to have something aside from its mystery that was enigmatic, and compelling. Even Dr. John, used as he was to all the Oriental fantasia, had felt it. A strange story, but Crewe wondered why it should haunt him. Other men had been murdered—lost—never heard of again—yet nobody minded. Even aside from Winton's danger, it was hard to define this thing which kept Kowloon hovering like a shadow in the back of his mind.

He was uneasily aware that he had not told quite everything to Victory. He had omitted the name of Elena Delgarda. He could not bring himself to speak it. She had come in out of the boisterous windy night, and the disturbing strangeness of her beauty, rising out of the dark stairway, had been so startling that he could not talk about it. The only person he had ever seen in the least comparable to her was another Latin, and she was in a picture by Velásquez. As long as he lived, he would

remember Elena in the old room. He would carry her image with him like a secret one hugged to oneself. To share it, even with Victory, was a kind of profanation. He had poked into many odd corners of the world, been a great traveler, and he was nearing forty, but no woman had charmed his imagination before.

Crewe sighed, took off his sun helmet and wiped his forehead. This was a damnably humid climate, and as he got older life was more and more of an enigma. His calesa took him past shops where the guttural talk of Chinese drifted out of open doors, and the long black ideographs announced that they sold silks, meat, fowl—inside. He passed Filipino tiendas where native women lounging in doorways smoked huge black cigars and chewed betel nut which reddened their lips and gums. Then at the end of a narrow steaming lane he saw the post office.

In Manila a post office is not a building. It is three sides of an open square, lined to the height of a man's head with mail boxes. On steamer days it is the focal point for all the vari-colored life of the Islands. White women in bright frocks rub elbows with bare-headed Filipinos; army and navy officers, in trim white uniforms with brass buttons, join the throngs of Chinese, swarthy Spaniards, and priests. Hindu gentlemen in white turbans, and exiled Russians looking too virile for the tropics, jostle and crowd and mill around the square, while the Filipino cocheros squat beside their ponies and pursue a running fire of gossip.

A brilliant eddying company, waiting for news of the far-away civilized world that many have left forever behind them. Cecil Crewe never felt so sharp a sense of being on the outer fringe of tropic islands, as he did when he waited here for news of sailings.

Dropping his letter to Peking in the box, he went up to one of the small windows where an apathetic Filipino looked through opaque eyes at the passing crowds.

"When will the next boat from Singapore be in?"

It iss going to be a week; she iss delayed."

"What wretched luck!" Crewe looked at his watch irritably. Only nine-thirty, too early by an hour to see Neil Winton. But he might take a few notes and look up a point or two while he was waiting. Hailing his cochero:

"To Ah Sing's bookshop," he said.

"Si, Señor."

They whirled down the Escolta, crossing the Pasig over a long white bridge, blinding white in the pitiless sun. He looked about for the little launch which had hugged the landing in the mists last night, but she was nowhere to be seen. The sluggish yellow water, glassy on top, was alive with cascos, bancas, and interisland steamers. Clumps of water hyacinth covered with fragile blue blossoms floated with the current. In some of the bancas not much bigger than canoes, he saw Filipina women putting charcoal under the clay stoves which cooked their morning rice. Here, in the hot

effluvium, was a Malay river life, that swarmed with natives; living, propagating, dying on mat-covered bancas or flat-bottomed cascos, which they seldom left. When he crossed this bridge he always was faintly reminded of Canton. Farther on he saw a flat boat piled high with coconuts being poled from a narrow estero into the Pasig; and beyond old Fort Santiago the typhoon signal was flying.

He could see it all, looking out from his hooded calesa at the fascinating colorful streets of the Intramuros, one of the most romantic spots left in a rather tawdry world. The streets were like Oriental mosaics in black and brown, with a definite pattern in yellow, the softly slipping Chinese. And always that infernal heat which surged up from the ground, and pressed down like clear Egyptian gold from the sky, destroying life and vitality. Not a white man's land. But a country for the mestizo and the native, for slow-moving, pale, and heavy-lidded women whose savage impulses matched the passions of their dark-skinned men.

On a corner not far from the Ataneo was Ah Sing's bookshop. Its high small-paned windows, dust encrusted, held a collection of ginger jars, covered with wicker, bright packages of jasmine and orange tea, Filipino sandals and dried fish, and big blue pot-bellied jars to satisfy the Chinese love of decoration. A wide door led down two steps into the dim cool interior which smelt of books and old papers, sandalwood, incense, and exotic foodstuffs. Cecil Crewe dismissed his cochero and hurried in out of the glare.

It was an empty shop, but he could hear Ah Sing's inflected voice raised in argument with a fruit vendor in the rear. Crewe winked his sun-dazzled eyes and waited. He knew China, and the Chinese, and from the tone of the bargaining he gathered that Ah Sing's purchases were about complete. The frenzied crescendo of resistance had reached its diminuendo of satisfaction. Crewe stood by the bookshelves listening, smiling a little at the Chinese mind, its shrewdness and agility, its acceptance of the practical, its tenacity in holding certain things of the spirit. The small bookshop, even with its alcove, was not more than twenty feet square, and crammed with books from floor to ceiling. Ah Sing had varied activities. He kept a bookshop, but a clearing house as well for most unusual transactions.

Filipino house-boys, cooks, Chinese servants, and merchants flocked to him. He translated letters, wrote letters, compounded usury, lent money, computed sums, and always knew exchange. He spoke pidgin Spanish and English, a queer polyglot tongue mixed with some Tagalog. His knowledge of the intimate affairs of Chinese and Filipino life in the Walled City made him a man of power in a position which could be dangerous. Nobody knew whether it was dangerous or not. Nobody knew much about Ah Sing, the most jovial Chinaman in Manila. Dr. John, to whom Ah Sing was an enigma and a delight, had brought Crewe to his bookshop.

"A character. He's got all these poor devils by the throat but they don't know it! Yet he's a very

decent sort. Ah Sing is fair with them, and they all trust him. It's remarkable what he's collected. He's got old manuscripts from temples in North China, others from Tibet—the Lord knows where he finds them all. He has some illuminated missals locked up in his desk that are very rare. He lets me look at them sometimes—you should see his eyes when he takes them out."

But Crewe had already observed Ah Sing's eyes. Even when his yellow moon face smiled and stretched its broadest, Ah Sing's slanting eyes remained cool and calculating. But Ah Sing had been very friendly. He had put a table in the alcove where the reference books were kept, so Crewe could browse and take notes undisturbed.

The bargaining ended abruptly on a triumphant Chinese cackle, and presently Ah Sing waddled into the shop. A tall, powerful, very fat Chinaman, with a long blue shirt stretched across his ample stomach. After greeting Crewe cordially, he flipflopped to his high counting desk in the corner.

"Catch'em hot!" he said.

Crew nodded, wondering how many times a day Ah Sing said it.

"Dr. John here, fi' minutes ago." Ah Sing climbed on his stool, picked up his abacus with its little balls like worn brown marbles, and began to flip the counters dexterously as he talked.

"Dr. John go to Ayuntamiento, to hear Manuel talkee—talkee—allee same say helluva little. Filipino no likee work—him politico—likee stand on stleet corner—talkee—talkee," Ah Sing chuckled.

Filipino politics, with their labyrinthine bypaths were child's play to the wise old Oriental who had been raised on the philosophy of Confucius.

"You want'em book? All lite." He waved an ample hand and applied himself to his accounts.

Half a dozen books on South China oil deposits were on a lower shelf and Crewe selected one, took out his notebook and dropped back in his chair. Occasionally Ah Sing's droning voice would rise above the noise of the streets. Through the window over his head, he could hear the shuffle of the pedestrians' chinelas, but behind his partition he was hidden from any one entering the shop.

Half an hour passed. His notebook showed clean lines of closely written sentences. Nobody had come in. There was only the droning rise and fall of Ah Sing's voice reading to himself; the pungent smell of Ah Sing's pipe; the yellow man's body smell, a faint tang which told the experienced Crewe, that Ah Sing sometimes smoked a little opium. He would not smoke it much; Ah Sing was too shrewd to be self-indulgent.

Then Crewe heard some one speak to the Chinaman. He stretched his cramped legs and looked at his watch. Ten o'clock! By Jove, it was time to go! He started to rise, but the newcomer, whoever he was, was still speaking. Involuntarily Crewe listened. It was a brisk commanding British voice—

"Well, he's here—somewhere—name's Winton—" Crewe sat down abruptly, every sense suddenly alert, vigilant. He heard Ah Sing in a lowered tone speaking Chinese, with more excitement.

Perhaps he also motioned to the alcove, for as Crewe, in a flux of emotion sat there, waiting, listening, his nerves on the trigger, he heard the British voice speak again.

"What? Oh—rawther! Why, didn't you say so, you bloody Chink!" Then a heavy step crossed the wooden floor, and Cecil Crewe looked up. A man in white clothes and a sun helmet stood outside the alcove staring down at him. He looked like a particularly hard type of ex-civil servant, the kind Crewe had so often seen in India. He gave Crewe an instant impression of nerve, power, boldness. It was Mayhew! Crewe was certain of it! He quietly leaned back, his glance held Mayhew's deliberately. There was no mistaking himself, his station in life, his class. He meant to impress these on Mayhew. He wanted him to know that if they met again, he would find an opposing power to reckon with. Mayhew, after a muttered apology, and looking a little puzzled, withdrew. Crewe heard Ah Sing climb down from his stool and the two men go out into the street together.

With the blood beating and surging behind his ears, Cecil Crewe sat still! He understood what Mayhew had come for. He knew why they had gone out of the shop. Ah Sing was the most powerful Chinaman in the Walled City. The shock of Ah Sing's connection with Ten Yen and this damned renegade Englishman overshadowed, for a moment, every other consideration. A precious trio! No wonder he had distrusted Ah Sing's eyes. Ah Sing, who had access to every cook, house-boy, merchant,

and native Chinese and Filipino in the Walled City. It was a strong position! Ten Yen would be a fool to overlook it—and Ten Yen was not a fool! This was his first move probably, but it was a good one! Crewe's thoughts whirled as the significance of Mayhew's visit grew clearer. His mind followed first one line and then another, all threatening immediate disaster to Neil Winton. Probably they had gone to every hotel in the Walled City, including the Mindora. They might get a name and a description from the Mindora—that was all. But it was quite enough! His mind leaped to another point that brought him to his feet. Angelo! The childlike Angelo! At any moment he might stop at the door to chatter with Ah Sing. Crewe could imagine his glib account of the American señor who had brought a certain importance, added a new luster to the Señor Doctor's house. And with Dr. John at the Ayuntamiento, how could Crewe find and muzzle Angelo? Why hadn't he thought of this last night? He'd been a stupid ass! Why hadn't Dr. John thought of it?

He stood by the table in the alcove, thinking. Outside, Mayhew was talking to Ah Sing. He could hear the Chinaman's guttural voice. Crewe couldn't make up his mind what to do—he was frankly puzzled, and dismayed. He moved softly out of the alcove—walked on tiptoe toward the front of the shop, and glanced at the little dusty window. Silhouetted against the glare of the sun he saw Ah Sing and Mayhew talking earnestly together. Going closer, he stared between the packages of tea

and the dusty red firecrackers at the powerful white-clad frame of Mayhew. He could see the puffy marks of dissipation under his bloodshot eyes, the bold well-cut mouth as he gave Ah Sing his final curt instructions. Once or twice Ah Sing shook his head, once or twice he nodded, finally his lips formed the laconic—"Shih!"

Crewe's mind, with its usual swift initiative, was made up.

When Ah Sing waddled down the narrow steps into his dim shop he saw an easy, collected Englishman, in immaculate white, his stick looped over his arm, sauntering toward the door. The kind of man who took it for granted that Time was made for him. And Ah Sing, coming from an old wise race, recognized the type that sits on top the world. He smiled his wide, creased smile.

"Catch'em lite book?" he inquired.

"Thanks very much—yes."

Crewe was in time to see Mayhew's calesa wheel away from the curb. He looked after it for a speculative moment, then stepped into another one which had appeared with the usual suddenness of these little vehicles in Manila.

"Follow that calesa!"

The cochero grunted to his small pony, bounced his whip up and down in the socket, and they were off at a surprisingly swift clip after Mayhew.

They passed under the great wall of the Illustrados, crossed a narrow causeway over a sunken garden of living green, that once had been a moat, and turned toward the harbor. Beyond the bright

trees and gardens of the Luneta sparkled the sweeping half-moon of the bay. Cecil Crewe watched the brilliant water as his calesa clattered along a white dusty boulevard in the direction of the Manila Hotel. No matter how often he had seen it, or from what direction he approached it, he always thought how beautiful Manila Bay was. He saw the warships of the Asiatic squadron, saw a great freighter or two rocking in the wind close by—and he wondered if one of these boats could be the *Che Kiang?* When he looked at Mayhew's calesa again, it had turned into the driveway that formed a half circle in front of the hotel.

The Manila Hotel was a huge modern building of concrete, with two sturdy wings that stretched out and faced the boulevard. Between these wings was a garden and, at the end of it, long shallow steps led up into the lobby through half a dozen wide doors closed only in typhoon weather. The lobby was extremely long and narrow, low round wicker tea tables, topped with polished wood, were scattered about it. The office, hidden behind large pillars of concrete, was at the rear, directly behind the entrance doors. On either side of it, wide uncarpeted stairs led to the rooms above.

Crewe had watched Mayhew toss his cochero a coin and saunter into the hotel, but when he stepped into the lobby and glanced around the Englishman was not to be seen. The great room was almost deserted. Guests were either playing bridge at morning parties in Manila or seeing their friends off on the big liner which sailed at noon.

Barefooted Filipino boys, with brown fiber brooms, yawned behind the potted palms. Crewe hesitated, then walked over to the desk. There stood the clerk, a tall thin Australian who was a walking directory to clubs, hotels, and all the bizarre scandal of the tropic world, where white men—and women—so often left their standards behind them on their boats. Crewe had known the clerk in Singapore.

"Good morning, Mr. Crewe. Hot, isn't it? And the wind—not too good. What can I do for you?"

"Morning, Carson. That Englishman who just came in—name's Mayhew—is he stopping here?"

"Mayhew? Oh, he's here off and on." The clerk laid down the letters he was sorting. Cecil Crewe looked at him steadily a minute, then shifted his stick to the other arm.

"Live here now, Carson?"

"He's been here a few days. Bit of a bounder, sir, but plenty of cash."

Crewe looked thoughtful, but interested. He took out his cigarette case and passed it over the desk, and Carson was flattered. He stared for a moment down at the rare old piece of damascene.

"He's been goin' around a bit with Julia Seeton —she travels up and down the boats from Singapore. But he's got a woman in Canton." Carson's lifted eyebrows placed the moral status of Julia Seeton—who traveled up and down—and also the woman in Canton.

"Gambles, did you say?" asked Crewe, after a moment.

"No, sir, I didn't say, but he does. Rawther!

Macao—they won't have him in the British Club—"

"I dare say not. Thanks, Carson, thanks very much." Cecil Crewe lit a fresh cigarette, dropped his stick over the other arm, and was turning away when Carson touched him.

"There he is—now—"

Crewe glanced around. Mayhew had come in from the bar and was standing beside the magazine desk talking to the girl. Crewe, weaving in and out between the white pillars, walked slowly down the lobby. He watched Mayhew. He saw his well-shaped mouth widen in a smile, his face change and become suddenly sex-conscious. Crewe wondered why? Then Mayhew's bold eyes visibly brightened, and Crewe looked around. A slender girl in black came slowly down one of the stairways. So that was it! But in the next instant Crewe had stopped short behind a pillar. Elena Delgarda! As she walked on into the lobby, Crewe saw her Spanish face stiffen when she saw Mayhew.

"Buenas dias, señor," she said coldly.

Mayhew moved nearer. "Hello!" he said, flicking the white camellia in her black gown with his fingers. "You look damned lovely this morning, Elena!" It was an intimate little movement. It said that he could easily touch more, and that he might—

Cecil Crewe's teeth bit down on his cigarette. Elena—that bounder called her Elena! Her dark eyes threw a glance at Mayhew that must have stung; with a whirl that sent a breath of perfume

into the hot air she walked swiftly on past him, down the corridor, and Mayhew stared after her, grinning. He was not in the least discomposed. His eyes appraised the set of her head, the turn of her ankles, the curves of her slender legs, with an expression that made Crewe writhe, long to take him by the throat, and beat his head against the floor. "Cad and beast!" Crewe's face, as he watched Mayhew saunter toward the elevator, said many and strange things.

How *could* she know him? A girl of good blood like Elena? He watched her walk on down the corridor to the small east entrance. Oblivious to the nearby exits, drawn irresistibly after her, Crewe followed until he reached the shadowy arch of the door that opened upon a narrow driveway. Here he was just in time to see her calesa, with its jingling harness, whirl out into the hot bright sun. He stood looking after it. Every man wanted Elena, Dr. John had said. And Mayhew wanted her—it was in his eyes. What protection had she up in that old hacienda, on the Pasig—which she called "triste." He had seen them often—weathered Spanish houses, standing close to the water, with their clustering nipa huts almost hidden under coco palms. Elena had already asked him to tea—and in the few moments it had taken him to reach the doorway Crewe had decided to go.

The big clock in the lobby pealed eleven! He started! By Jove! he had forgotten Neil, Angelo, the immediate danger that threatened Dr. John's household—everything—every one—but Elena!

## CHAPTER XIII

DR. JOHN also had forgotten that Time goes on swift feet even in passive tropic islands. Down at the Ayuntamiento he had been sitting, absorbed, hugging his elbows in delight over the flamboyant and often brilliant speeches of the Filipino members of the legislature. It had been Manuel's morning. He spoke, as usual, on Independence. His nervous square-cut face and fervid gestures had held them all spellbound. Independence! The doctor chuckled! They talked, ah, how much better than they worked, these Filipino politicos.

Then quite suddenly he discovered that it was eleven o'clock! In his house he had left a guest, asleep. One whose affairs could take a quick turn and rapidly become menacing. And he, with his helpful knowledge of Malaysia had dawdled! As he stepped into a calesa, the doctor was a penitent man in his tumbled white clothes with the Batangas straw hat partly concealing his tousled hair.

"Hurry up, boy!"

The cochero stared back in mild surprise—that even an Americano on a day when the whole earth was swimming in heat waves—and the sky was like a brass bowl, should cry—"Hurry!"

He hustled his small pony through the gay-

colored but somnolent streets of Intramuros, sending long hisses into the hot air to clear the way. As they skidded around a corner, Dr. John looked at the weather station and with a start he saw the Number Three signal was up. He glanced at the cloudless sky. Impossible, unless one had lived in the Islands, to understand that a typhoon could be gathering out there on the Yellow Sea when the day was so bright. He had often seen the Number Two signal fly for a week, while people, unconcerned, went about their affairs. Then, in swift succession, the third, four, fifth, and sixth signals would be run up; the sun would be blotted out; the storm would swoop down, while frail nipa huts flattened like card houses. But the typhoon was far away—and his blue eyes came back to the streets.

That was a thrilling tale Crewe had related last night. Thrilling! Although the doctor didn't know Ten Yen, he knew the Chinese mind, and realized the danger young Winton was in. He shouldn't have left him alone, but of course Crewe would be there, so the lad was safe enough. Yet he was relieved when he saw the square towers of old Santa Maria soar against the blue sky. Directly across from it was his house and approaching him was a girl in white who walked rapidly. He leaned and peered. Hurrying like this—at noonday! The set of her head, the angle of her parasol, the swift determination that was carrying her over the blistering pavements as if she scorned them, made him look closer. Then he smiled. It was Victory Crewe.

Her pretty lips were tightly closed, her flushed face was set. She was Dr. John's own special friend and confidante; the only woman with whom he ever discussed Far Eastern politics. He was delighted to see her. He meant to tell her about Manuel's speech this morning, they would have a good laugh over it.

"Well," she said, when he had dismissed his cochero. There was something defiant in her tone; he took another quick look at her face.

"Come in, or you'll have a stroke, standing in the sun!"

They turned into the passage beneath the house; Dr. John took off his hat and wiped his forehead.

"Well, Victory?" She came directly to the point.

"Whyever did you let the Delgarda house to us? I'd never lived in it a minute if I'd known it belonged to a girl like that Elena! I thought there was only the señor. You know when there's a man, one can manage." She faced him at the foot of the stairs, her eyes flashing.

"Elena?" Dr. John raised surprised eyebrows. "Elena?"

"Yes—Elena! A cat! A Spanish cat! You understand these Spaniards, Dr. John, you should have had more judgment! She's the most insulting person I ever met! Of course, I'm not going to stop on there! You know—I'm—"

But Dr. John was uneasy, listening; there was an anxious look on his face. Yet he was amused too. This was so like Victory; one was never in any doubt about *her* emotions.

"My dear, come on up into the sala. It's blistering here. I left young Winton alone this morning, and I'm worried about him."

"Oh, yes." Victory began to mount the stairs.

In the sala Dr. John glanced quickly around. Neil's door was closed; so he was still asleep then. The dusky old room with its shelves of books, its ferns, its austere white walls, its Moro baskets, and sarongs from Jola, seemed cool after the cruel glare of the streets. He sighed in relief and looked back at Victory. Whenever she came into his ancient sala he thought how she glowed against this old tropical background. She had taken her yellow shade hat off, and stood by one of the black and white Bilibid chairs. She was wearing an organdie frock embroidered in corn color, a spray of cadena de amor had been carelessly thrust into the girdle. She had the true English skin, fresh, velvety, and he always thought her eyes had the deep blue of the Manila sky before sunset.

"And now"—he asked—"what the devil has Elena been doing? How did you meet her?"

"She came," said Victory, watching him from under level frowning brows, "to get the ducky jewel box I kept on my dressing table. And she took it too! She was perfectly incensed because we were in her casa. She said that one of her ancestors,—a frightful person in a black wig, would turn in her grave—no—turn in her tomb—no—*tomba.*"

"Tomba? By jingo—she said that, did she? And what did *you* say?" Victory drew herself up with dignity.

"I kept my temper, Dr. John—just fancy!"

Involuntarily Dr. John laughed. He patted her arm.

"Never mind, my dear. She didn't mean anything. Elena's a man's woman." Victory's blue eyes darkened.

"She said she'd met Cecil, but I didn't believe her. How could she have met him? He said nothing about meeting *her?*"

There was a surprised glint in Dr. John's face as he straightened the papers on his desk.

"Victory, come and sit down. I want to tell you what Manuel said this morning." But Victory stood where she was, and as she eyed him Dr. John flinched under that rigorous scrutiny.

"Dr. John, you're spoofing me. You're trying to protect Cecil. I'm in the mood for a friendly little quarrel with you. Where *did* he meet this Elena?"

He was amused at her penetration, and he saw that he might just as well tell the truth.

"He met her here—last night."

"Oh—" An odd little pause fell between them. Victory looked at him, then looked away. He could see uneasiness growing in her mind; it was growing in his mind too. It *was* queer that Cecil hadn't mentioned Elena to Victory. He suddenly remembered Crewe's fascinated eyes as he watched the young señora last night. It was more than queer—como no?

"Elena dropped in on her way home from the Spanish Club to find out about Angelo. Her amah is Angelo's mother. Winton and your brother both

met her," said the doctor, slightly embarrassed. In his own mind he added, "And they both went down before her."

"Oh—" said Victory again.

Dr. John hurriedly opened the little drawer in his big table.

"Have a cigarette. I'm keeping your particular brand now."

"Thanks." Victory lit one and looked around. "Where's Mr. Winton?"

"In his room asleep. When I went out I told Angelo not to disturb him. Crewe was coming early; I thought he'd be here now."

"He is here now." Victory saw a tall white figure emerge from the black stairway. "Hillo," coldly.

"Hello—I'm late!" Crewe took off his sun helmet and came into the room. His sandy hair was damp, his cheeks were scarlet from heat and haste, there was a conscience-stricken look in his eyes. He glanced at his sister.

"What are you doing here, Victory? Where's Winton?"

"I don't believe he's here." She blew a smoke ring into the air.

"Not here?" Crewe turned a startled face to Dr. John.

"Certainly he's here! But we haven't seen him! You see I was late getting home—those infernal Filipinos. I got interested and didn't remember what time it was," explained the doctor, knocking on Neil's door. There was no response. "That's odd!" He knocked again.

"Go in," said Crewe curtly, turning white. "Here, let me!" In his hurry he thrust Dr. John aside and stepped into the bedroom. Dr. John peered over his shoulder, and Victory jumped to her feet. Apparently Angelo had not been near the room, for Neil's night things, brushes, sponges, were strewn about.

"He isn't here!" gasped the doctor, looking at Crewe. "Why—why—where is he?"

"Where's Angelo?" Crewe turned suddenly on Dr. John.

"Angelo?" Dr. John stared at the disordered room. "I don't know. Why hasn't he cleaned up here? He must be somewhere about. Angelo!" he called angrily. "Angelo!" There were no answering sounds of steps or voices in the house. The silence was so profound that the bells of Santa Maria, tolling for the noon hour, made them start. The two men stared into each other's white faces. Then Dr. John, looking about with a more searching eye, saw the breakfast table still under the ferns in the window—only part of the dishes had been taken away—and the kitchen door was wide open. Victory's quick eyes followed his.

"Something's happened," she said crisply.

"My God—we should have been here to prevent it!" from Crewe.

"Well, it looks queer! But I don't believe Angelo's gone." The doctor was stubbornly holding to his idea. "I'm going down to his room, perhaps he didn't hear me. Angelo!" They could hear him calling—"Angelo!"

Crewe, white, stricken, watched him go.

Victory had been examing the room. "He had his breakfast—he's smoked several cigarettes—and—oh, see—Cecil, he'd started to write a letter."

Crewe looked down at the table. There was a pad and a fountain pen that had apparently just been laid down. On the top of a sheet of paper Neil had written:

"The Ransome Art Gallery—New York City—New York—

"My dear Mr. Ransome—"

Crewe read it aloud.

"The Ransome Art Gallery," repeated Victory. "Is Mr. Winton an artist, Cecil? What *does* he do?"

"Well, by Jove—I don't know." As they looked at each other they could hear Dr. John's voice echoing and reëchoing through the many windowed rooms—"Angelo! Angelo!" he was calling.

"Angelo is gone!" said Victory. It was a sudden conviction.

"Neil is gone!" said Crewe in an awed tone, "How did they get him?" The amazing rapidity with which Ten Yen and Mayhew had acted alarmed him more than anything had done in his long experience in the Far East. Those two! But it must have been Ten Yen. Ten Yen with the endless cunning of his mind. The doctor's agile little figure came running up the stairs.

"Angelo is gone!" he cried, breathing fast. "It isn't like him—he must have been sent out on some errand."

"Or lured away!" suggested Victory.

"Ho—who'd lure Angelo way?" cried the doctor with scorn.

Crewe started to speak, but Victory's eyes had found something crumpled on the floor. She came close and bent down to see what it was.

"Look!" she pointed to it.

"It's his cap!" said Crewe. He stopped, but Victory caught his arm.

"Stop, Cecil! Dr. John, come here! D'ye see—it's halfway under the table. He didn't have time to pick it up."

"By jingo! He didn't!" Dr. John turned a sickly white. "Why in thunder did he have to go as quickly as that?"

"His red hair," groaned Crewe, "would be like a beacon."

"Cecil, something serious has happened—I can feel it!" Victory shivered.

"It's Ah Sing," said Crewe suddenly. "And Angelo!" He turned to the doctor. "It's my fault and your fault, Dr. John. We've been incompetent fools! Asses! Criminally careless! Both of us! We should have frightened Angelo within an inch of his life to prevent his telling. Ah Sing got Neil through Angelo!"

"Ah Sing!" shouted the doctor. "Crewe, you're crazy! How could Ah Sing be mixed up in this?"

"But he is, rather!" said Crewe grimly. "Listen!" Standing by the table he told them what he had overheard at Ah Sing's bookshop, and as they

watched him, amazed, fascinated, he repeated what the loquacious clerk had told him in the Manila Hotel.

"Ah Sing! Ah Sing!" The doctor's face was growing red, and redder, and his eyes more furious. "That damned Chino!"

"He's only a tool," said Victory, contemptuously.

Crewe was striding up and down. "I stayed too long. I didn't dream they'd strike so soon. They got Angelo, of course, and then they came here for Neil."

"If I hadn't lost all track of time, if I'd only come home when I should," groaned the doctor, full of remorse as he limped about the room.

"We've *got* to find him—they may do anything. I'm going to hunt up Mayhew, see if he's still at the hotel." Crewe stopped abruptly, a new thought in his mind. "Where do you suppose Ten Yen is?—He's not likely to be at the hotel. He's never seen in public places. Even in Kowloon and Hong Kong where he pulls the strings in all sorts of wretched schemes nobody ever *sees* him—except the initiated. Here *I'm* in Manila because of Ten Yen's treachery with my own Government, yet I've seen him only once!"

"If we knew where the *Che Kiang* is—" said Victory pursuing her own train of thought.

"Neil heard them say she was halfway to Manila, but that was two days ago; she might be at anchor outside the harbor—"

"Why doesn't she come in?" asked Dr. John, over his shoulder.

"She can't land without the key!" said Victory impatiently.

"Never heard of such a thing!—Why can't a boat land without a key?—They don't lock it up to the pier—do they?" said the doctor in disgust.

"Cecil—" Victory's puzzled eyes studied her brother—"where do those men meet?—they must have some place—"

"I don't know," said Crewe gloomily, "but I'm going to get a launch and scour the harbor for the *Che Kiang*. I may have to go out past Cavite—it will take some time—" He caught up his sun helmet. He was cool, competent—resourceful again.

Dr. John swept his Batangas straw hat on his head.

"Good!" with decision, "and I—" with a grim thrust of his chin—"am going down to see that Chief of Customs. I'm going to find out something about that *Che Kiang*—when she's due—what her cargo is—and where she docks. If they've got Neil on their hellish boat, I'll take it up with the Governor-General. If that boy doesn't turn up by night—I'll do it anyway! An American can't disappear in broad daylight in the Walled City—"

Crewe, on his way to the stairway, stopped and looked back.

"Be careful. If Spanish law steps in and officials get the key, they'll probably keep it. That's what Neil is trying to avoid, Dr. John. Ten Yen wants that key, he has to have it. He's followed Neil, you see, to Manila—and even tried to kill him—to get it. It isn't the key, alone—it's what it unlocks, what

it means to Ten Yen. Besides, even though Neil *has* gone, we haven't any evidence that he's been taken away, you know."

Victory nodded; Cecil was right, he always thought things through.

"Victory," said Crewe, starting down the stairs, "you'd better go home. You might come back once or twice to see if Neil has returned—or Angelo! *He* should be able to tell us something—"

"If they do anything to Angelo—" It was the doctor's voice floating back from the landing. Even in this crisis he thought of Angelo—and Victory smiled.

But as she walked home through the crowded simmering streets she was in a perplexed dissatisfied mood. The doctor's house was only four or five squares away from Delgarda Casa. She passed Ah Sing's bookshop—hesitated—went back and peered down into its dim interior two steps below the pavement. Ah Sing was not there, but a small misshapen Filipino squatted on the floor beside the counting desk. He scowled so threateningly that she resisted an impulse to go in. She walked on wondering why he had looked at her like that?

All during luncheon her mind was following Cecil, chugging about the hot bay and hunting the *Che Kiang;* or peppery Dr. John, interviewing the suave Chief of Customs and very likely learning nothing; or Neil, rushing out of the house to protect the precious and sinister old key which she had never seen. Where could Neil have gone in this old city which was strange to him?—And there was

the Filipino in Ah Sing's shop—he had never seen her before—why had he looked so somber and vindictive?

Everybody was doing something to end this mystery, but she, who had stood by Cecil's side through half a dozen high adventures, sat tamely in this old casa and held her hands! The thing was not to be borne—she wouldn't bear it! She sat staring down into the patio, rejecting first one plan—and then another. What could *she* do?—At last a thought struck her—her eyes brightened—she smiled and called Pilar.

"Tell Vicente he needn't serve tea this afternoon. I'm having tea at the Manila Hotel," said Victory.

## CHAPTER XIV

ANGELO, full of the joy of life, strolled down Calle Victoria that morning. It was a new day, the storm had passed, the sun shone—Gracias á Dios! And the strange Americano in el Señor Doctor's casa had been lavish in praise of the mangoes, of the eggs boiled in the outlandish Americano fashion, of the coffee. He had laughed and given Angelo one American dollar, not knowing, of course, that it equaled two Filipino pesos. A very innocent Americano, pale this morning, yet different from the sick man of the night before who had resembled nothing so much as an unripe pineapple sprout. Angelo had glued his eye to the keyhole often that morning, for el Señor Doctor had warned him to let the Americano sleep, but at the very first sign of life Angelo had brought in the breakfast, and entertained the señor, with the net result of two pesos.

Distracting—the number of things two pesos would buy. For Pilar, of course, the red beads in the shop of Fernando; for himself, a peseta or two to bet on Vicente's brown cock at Malate, and the fire crackers which made the delightful noise at old Ah Sing's. For the Americano holiday was approaching that permitted such an outburst. Angelo strolled and strutted, pausing at last before Ah Sing's door.

The Chinaman was not behind his desk. When Angelo peered into the dusty length of his shop he saw him talking to a Filipino in the rear. It was Elpidio, the Chinese mestizo, and Angelo wrinkled his nose up in disgust. A most unholy man! Ah Sing glanced around and seeing Angelo's beaming face he waddled to the door.

"Have pesos," announced Angelo. "Mucho. I buy noise—" He slipped to the window and pointed to the dusty firecrackers.

"'Ello, Ang-lo. How many?" Ah Sing's eyes, restless, eager, scanned the pedestrians passing the door.

"Cuanto?" Angelo's face was excited.

"Ten centavos—one."

"I take three—si," said Angelo, giving him the American dollar with an air.

"Catch 'em velly much money, Ang-lo." Ah Sing's eyes widened. "Where *you* get?"

"El Americano in Señor Doctor's casa, he very rich—very simpático. He say—'Angelo, you one damn fine cook—go buy something!'" The brown boy giggled, but Ah Sing's eyes came back with a snap.

"Dr. John—catch 'em fliend?" casually.

"Oh, si," said Angelo, squatting on the doorsill for a chat. "Dr. John sew him up tight, last night. Si!"

It was very still for a moment in Ah Sing's bookshop; while the jovial Chinaman silently wrapped the firecrackers.

"Catch 'em *old* man?" giving the boy his package.

"No—no—him young, with hairs red—red like sunset on the Luneta," chuckled Angelo.

Ah Sing came closer.

"Catch 'em *name?*"

"Oh, si"—indifferently—"el Señor Winton. How you look, Ah Sing—" he scowled and drew back, crossing himself. "Like devil! You sick? Si?"

"Lil pain, Ang-lo. Dr. John home, now?"

"Ayuntamiento," shrugged Angelo. "*I* take care of Americano. Señor Doctor come back one hour, two hour—lunch, mebbie." Blissfully fingering his firecrackers, Angelo stared out at the brilliant street. And big blue-clad Ah Sing stared, his eyes thoughtful, his pendulous mouth sagging.

"Ang-lo—you take 'em chit for Ah Sing?" he questioned. But Angelo shook his head. No chit, no. Angelo must return at once to the doctor's casa. He had left his work—

"Velly important. I pay fi' pesos!" The money was dangled before the childish Filipino face. "Chit for my fiend in Santa Mesa."

Angelo sat back, he blinked, he stared at the money—five pesos! He glanced at Ah Sing, so fat, so smooth, so friendly. And Angelo rose. The saints would desert a house-boy who refused five pesos, especially since el Señor Doctor had said he must give *all* of his wages to Paula, his mother.

"You take'em calesa," said Ah Sing, smiling. "Velly fine lide—I pay!"

So the hectic excitement of a calesa was to be added to the pesos! Angelo surrendered at once.

"Si—si—Ah Sing! I take!" And in a few minutes

he was sitting very erect, rattling over the cobbles in a calesa, clutching the note he was taking to Santa Mesa, a good hour away.

Up in the sala of Dr. John's old house, Neil Winton, oddly enough, was thinking of Angelo. He was so innocent, so bland, so impertinently funny. They had talked over the breakfast. Angelo said that the Señor Doctor had gone out to buy some books. "But, como no—I, Angelo, know he can not do"—shuffling closer—"I haf remove every peseta from hiss pocket," he confided.

At Neil's start of surprise, Angelo moved his black head like a little wise game cock.

"Better he iss full in the stomach than full in the head, señor. The blessed Virgin knows that if it were not for me, Angelo, the chickens would stay under the nipa huts, and the mangoes rot in the tiendas; there would be nothing but books for the ants to feed on in this casa." It was a point of view. Neil had never heard materialism more neatly expressed.

The sala was hot, with opalescent lights filtering in through the ferns. It looked shabbier this morning. It had an atmosphere hard to unravel. Latin, but Latin mixed like the blood of a mestizo made that queer fusion of Spain in Asia. The ferns hung listless in the enormous windows, and heat rising from the patio was faintly visible, like a presence.

Neil felt irritated, impotent! Why hadn't Crewe come? He was a man to count on. Frail, but keen, very keen. And where was Dr. John, his small alert

countryman, who knew every inch of the Walled City? Absurd of them to expect him to remain shut up in this Spanish house. Why should he? Ridiculous of Crewe to imagine that anything could happen to an American in broad daylight in Manila. His arm ached, but his head was clear. He felt fit enough, ready for anything. The house was very still. He thought Angelo must have gone out. He sat under the ferns, stretched himself in the long Bilibid chair—and smoked; he tried to write a letter—gave it up. But he did not hear the soft closing of the big iron gates below. He fumed and fretted, but he was quite unconscious that Chinese sandals padded quietly along the dark passage. His eyes did stray to the great well of the stairs, and he remembered the passage into which they had hurried out of the storm last night. He had thought then that stairways that cleft old houses midway, as this one did, were too reminiscent of ambuscades and surprises to be safe.

The stairs creaked. Was some one coming up? Probably not. Houses as old as this were always full of noises. Yet he listened; he sat up in his chair and looked around; but there was not a sound, nothing but the most complete silence. He got up, without knowing why, and stood a moment, nervous, restless, by the table. The strong hot odors of the sala, odors of tobacco, of old leather, of damp ferns, wrapped themselves around him, until he felt oppressed.

Then a quick nervous tightening ran through him. In the next breath he knew there was some one on

the stairs! Very quiet, listening, he braced himself against the table. That was not a step he heard, but a shuffle. White men did not walk like that! Thoroughly aroused, he eyed the black gash in the mahogany floor a moment, then, as he started toward the stairs, he felt a quick cold conviction that walls were closing in on him—walls of the old house—of the old city— Down that dim stairway with its boxed angle, a man would not have a chance for his life, not one!

It was a ponderous body that shuffled, moving with a curious stealthy ease up the steps. Emerging from the blackness he saw a skullcap on top of a jovial yellow face. Neil stood frowning, puzzled, looking down! The face did not match the inimical movement of the body. But below the face was a formidable, blue-clad Chinese frame. A very powerful man, this Chinaman, whose arms were filled with books. Neil studied him! He was not trusting Chinamen who climbed stairs with quiet stealth. He was not trusting this one! He stood by the top step, waiting, but strictly on his guard. At the third step from the top the big Chinaman paused, smiling genially.

"Velly hot—catch 'em new book for my fiend, Dr. John. My name—Ah Sing."

Neil relaxed; but he did not smile back.

"Sorry, he's not in."

"Think 'em more better wait," concluded Ah Sing, moving one step higher.

Neil drew back a little. He was in a quandary. He did not like that one step up, nor this ominous quiet

persistence. Ah Sing was far too genial, granting this *was* Ah Sing. If Angelo were here he would know. The black eyes, down below him, had a watchful gleam that no white man could decipher. Suddenly, out of the long dark passage under the house, and stealing up the stairs with the yellow man, came distinct intimations of evil! Neil felt them!

"You need not wait!" he said with finality.

"All lite! All lite!" indifferently. Ah Sing's eyes roved over Neil's stocky body, his red hair—then he sprang, his muscles unleashing like a tiger's, his books rolling in every direction.

This time Neil was ready! Before those powerful arms could reach him, he had leaped back, and putting all his sturdy young strength into one smashing blow, he hit Ah Sing. The Chinese knife flashed, but fists, swifter than the knife, caught Ah Sing in the chest! Sent him reeling and choking down the steps. He cursed, spitting like a cat. He rolled over and over, clutching at the smooth walls on either side, while Neil, breathing hard, watched him. Then a sound in the sala made him turn! Stealing in through the kitchen door was an evil-faced Filipino. *That* meant an ambuscade! In two jumps, Neil had followed Ah Sing. He leaped over his prostrate body, planted another kick full in his protruding stomach, while Ah Sing groaned aloud. Then taking the remaining steps in flying leaps, Neil reached the passage. Rushing through it, he jerked the iron gates open, and was out at once in the pitiless and blinding sun.

For a second he hesitated. No more dark passages

and shadowy corners for him. He could not have a chance, back there with those hyenas. Across the street stood an old white church. He swung over, ran along its blind walls, turned a corner and hailed a passing calesa.

"Down this street anywhere! Hurry!"

As they rattled away he drew back into the shelter of the hood to think it over. He was half blind with sun and rage. Ten Yen and Mayhew had hunted him down, finally. This time, only his extraordinary luck and some subtle miraculous outside warning, had saved him. And now, Dr. John's old house was neither safe nor friendly. The terrific heat of noonday rushed into his face and struck through his clothes, but he hardly felt it. He was wondering what he would do next. Where he would go? They might get him, it looked as if they would—but they would never get the key! He would destroy it first!

He laughed a little grimly, he was half hysterical when he remembered that ten minutes ago, back in the easy security of the doctor's sala, he had told himself how safe he felt in broad daylight in Manila. Yet here he was—fleeing through the hot streets—not knowing which way to turn.

## CHAPTER XV

WHICH way should he go? Where should he turn? His cochero lashed his little pony and they rattled along beside the high wall. Round and round—Neil tried to think! Hatless, he knew his red hair must shine like a flame in these hot dusty lanes, crowded with natives. The key was safe. He could feel the sharp edges of the box in his trousers-pocket. But they would hunt him from place to place, from house to house, as long as he kept it. He began to realize a little of Ten Yen's power—that was like an evil serpent, doubling, twisting in and out among the hundreds of natives and Chinese who swarmed in dim courts and stifling patios. Already it had touched Ah Sing—the doctor's friend.

Where, in heaven's name, was Crewe? He had been late, but he might be out looking for the *Che Kiang.* Perhaps he had even taken a launch and gone outside the harbor. That was a long boat ride. Neil had come in that way, past Cavite. As for Dr. John—God alone knew what had happened to him and to Angelo. They had disappeared, vanished, without a sign, a word! Perhaps they too had been tricked by an agent of the resourceful one, who was all Neil knew of the devil.

As for the safety of daylight—he had lost his

faith in that. Useless to go to the Delgarda Casa—Crewe wouldn't be there. And he sheered away from the Hotel Mindora. Every road in front of him was blocked! As the cochero drove at his smart pace around and around the great wall, Neil looked at it, then hurriedly looked away. Walls—whichever direction he turned.

He must decide at once! He couldn't ride in an open calesa when he was hunted by every venal Chinese or Filipino in the Walled City. There was just one other person he knew here, but she was far away. Remote—up on the Pasig. "Remote"—it was a charmed word just then for his mind to fasten upon. She had urged him to call at her hacienda, but of course this was the wrong hour. Yet what the devil did that matter? He thought of her face, wistful and sparkling. She was so—what was the word she used?—"simpático." Yes, she was that. Beautiful and sympathetic, she would understand.

"Driver—"

"Si, señor." The wizened brown face looked over a soiled white shoulder.

"I want a taxi—"

"At the Plaza Goiti, señor."

In the busy Plaza Goiti he paid the cochero, stepped into his taxi but he was careful not to give a direction to the chauffeur until the cochero was out of sight.

"To the Señora Delgarda's hacienda on the Pasig. Know the way?" The Filipino consulted another chauffeur, then came back smiling.

"Si, señor—it is past Santa Ana, up the river."

"Good—" Neil closed the door.

As they weaved a slow passage through calesas, carromatos, automobiles, carabao carts, and sauntering pedestrians, he drew back in the shadow of the car and watched the strange streets. People stared at his red hair, and he promptly pulled the blinds down. It was stifling in the car, and when they left the business district he pulled them up again. Farther out they passed barrio after barrio; he saw the clean-swept dirt roads winding among nipa huts half hidden in banana plants and areca palms. Natives in scarlet trousers and stripped to the waist were working in the rice fields under the scorching sun. The taxi moved over little white stone bridges that crossed esteros, and down roads where dust swirled in golden clouds. He saw it all through the haze of his abstraction. But he knew now that his trip up the river was a stroke of inspiration. Later, when dusk prowled in the badly lighted streets, he could come back to the doctor's house. Perhaps, if he were lucky, he could go in unperceived. They would have missed him, Crewe and Dr. John—they would have wondered, of course—but they would be waiting for him. Certainly they would understand that something had happened. As he watched the black pigs scurrying across the road, and Filipinos walking hand in hand and carrying fighting cocks, he wondered how much farther out on the Pasig was the señora's hacienda.

Then his chauffeur stopped before a high iron

fence ending in a pair of fantastic iron gates, and Neil dismissed him.

Elena Delgarda's hacienda stood apart at the extreme end of a tiny barrio of clustering nipa huts smothered in palms and bamboos. A curving driveway led to the big stone house half hidden behind trees and vines. He walked slowly; the crunch of his feet on the sunken flagstones seemed to be the only noise for miles around. The hacienda was lovely in the hot light of early afternoon, but it was lonely too, with an air of brooding desolation.

The door was open. But there was no sign of life anywhere as he went up the wide stone steps. A great hall ran through the house, reminding him of the hallways in old American dwellings in the South, and through the far door he caught a shimmer of the river. There was a winding staircase leading to living rooms on the second floor, but downstairs all the high carved doors were shut. For a moment he looked about curiously, then pulled the bell cord, hearing a tinkle in a far-off room.

Silence! He pulled the cord again, then the native shuffle sounded, bare feet on the bare boards of a floor. A Filipina slipped down the stairs. She was bent, wrinkled, dressed in long skirts and full sleeves. He wondered if she were Angelo's mother? The one the señora had called Paula. "Pah-oo-lah" —it had sounded like music when she said it.

If it was Paula, she had a strong streak of suspicion in her. Her black eyes traveled over his red

head, his woolen knickerbockers, then back to his flushed hot face.

"I'd like to see the Señora Delgarda," said Neil slightly disconcerted.

She took his card, examined it carefully, thrust it into the bosom of her frock; apparently that was all she was going to do with it.

"The señora iss in siesta."

"Siesta?"

"Si, señor—she iss asleep."

Neil stared—"Well, you might ask if she can't see me a moment. She knows me." Paula shook her head.

"The señora iss in siesta!" The tone was final.

"But see here" impatiently—"I've come all the way from Manila to see her. Can't you wake her up?" Paula raised shocked eyebrows, as if she wondered how anywhere there could be people so barbarous as not to know the tropic rule of siesta.

"Impossible—señor." Neil drew out his wallet. It was repugnant, bribing a servant of the señora's, but here was an uncommonly obstinate old woman. Paula's eyes gleamed as she clutched the bill.

"Come, señor—you are going to wait."

He followed her through the long hall to the river side of the house. Here was a balcony, spreading across the front, with a wide staircase leading up from the water. The sala, then, was on the second floor. Neil climbed the shallow steps, glancing about curiously. The garden was green, narrow—with a long sweep down to the jetty. There were flaming flowers in it, and a magnificent clump of

bamboos. On the balcony were comfortable couches, some Spanish books, and other proofs of the señora's recent presence.

"I tell the señora, when she wake—immediatamente—" Even with a lavish tip, that was the only concession to be wrung from the wretched Paula. She vanished; and Neil dropped down into one of the wicker chairs. He looked at the sluggish Pasig, fringed with palms and feather-headed bamboos, lying brassy and silent in the sun. So sleepy and so Eastern. Of course he must wait, there was nothing else to do. Between the hibiscus borders of the garden he could see the señora's small jetty running out into the river, almost choked with river grass and water hyacinth. On the other side native women were beating clothes on white slabs of stone, while carabaos wallowed near them. And occasionally a banca, poled by a Filipino, floated by. A lazy life; a lazy river; a strange Eastern world, riddled with carelessness, neglect, decay. It amazed and chilled him. Instinctively his healthy American mind recoiled from it.

The heat was prostrating! He mopped his face, he smoked cigarette after cigarette. He thought, waited, wondered how a girl as lovely as Elena could endure to live in a place that had such a sinister and strange effect. An hour passed and Paula brought him a cold drink.

"She still sleeps," the Filipina whispered.

"Damn!" he muttered at Paula's back. For three hours every afternoon these people rested, slept, while the world's business dropped from their lax

fingers. Awful thing, siesta! Demoralizing! He wondered what would happen if Paula should waken her señora. He looked at the vivid green of Elena's garden. At the big stone house, its walls veined with creepers, and climbing cadena; he tried the books—all Spanish. And another hour passed. He was growing bored and tired. Then voices, quick exclamations—she was awake! He glanced at his watch; on the river the steady pound and squash of flails on linen had ceased. Native women waded in the water washing their long black hair, and chattering like magpies. Paula put her head around the door and nodded. Then he heard a quick step on the bare boards, and the señora came out on the balcony.

He sprang to his feet. She was in white; thin frock, silk stockings, high-heeled white slippers. Her fan was scarlet, and long ruby earrings were in her ears. She had taste—Elena.

"Buenos Dios, señora—I didn't understand about the siesta. Sorry if it's a breach of manners." He was nervous and embarrassed. Elena laughed.

"Your Spanish, señor—it iss so funny! Do you know what you say?" She held up a mocking finger.

"Good afternoon—didn't I?"

"No—no." Her dark eyes sparkled with mischief. "You say—'Good God!' Now you go to church—for an Ave." In the thin clear light of the balcony he saw how flawless her skin was; what a pale haunting little face she had against hair, cloudy,

lusterless, with deep violet lights where it waved over her ears.

"You have come veree soon—which iss nice," she announced. "Now you will sit down while Paula brings tea. Veree hot—to make you cool." Her hands were busy with the ornate silver service which Paula had already brought out. Every piece bore the splashing Delgarda crest. The tea table was the one spot of opulence he had seen in the neglected hacienda. Elena's pale hands hovered over sugar, lemon, the rum bottle.

"One—two—three—señor?" with the tongs poised and a little smile.

"Enough, thanks"—smiling back. By George, she was a beauty!

"It iss veree lonely here, in my old casa. It iss what you call the bien fortune that you come to-day to have tea." She sighed. Her fingers moved about among the old Canton cups—"Si, I am veree lonely!"

My Lord! he should think she might be lonely. His glance met hers, lingered a moment, then dropped to his tea cup. Naturally the señora would feel that his visit was only a masculine tribute to beauty and great charm. He looked across at her sitting in a spreading Peacock chair, and faintly smiling.

"Last night, señor," she said solicitously, "you are so pale—and your arm—it iss hurt?"

"Last night, señora, a man tried to kill me in the Spanish Gate! He stabbed me!" Elena gave a

shocked little scream, and the cup that was halfway to her lips was set down hurriedly.

"Dios! But why, señor, did he try to keel you?"

"Well, you see, señora, I came here from China on a dangerous errand. I can't tell anybody about it now. But I have some enemies."

"Si—everybodee hass enemies. But what can they do to you, here, in Manila?" She looked at him, wide-eyed.

"They can do a lot! To-day I felt as if the whole Walled City was after me."

"Si, señor—but I understand. Now the Spaniards are gone—and the Americans, they have no power—there iss much knifing, killing, stealing—veree bad people everywhere. But why did you not go to the Jefe?"

"The Jefe?" Neil was watching her through a thin cloud of smoke.

"Si—he iss what you call Chief of Poleece." He shook his head and she smiled. He saw how instantly her Spanish mind had fastened on intrigue. She leaned a little closer, her color deepened.

"It was wonderful that I could come up here, to your hacienda. I needed to leave Manila for awhile—it was the only place I could go." Elena was delighted.

"Señor—now you have more cake—si. And more tea. It iss veree nice you come. But you tell me—how you get away, in la Puerta."

"I couldn't have got away, except for Mr. Crewe. He was smoking on top the wall. He ran down just

in time." Elena clasped her hands, her eyes were bright.

"He save your life—ah—que esplendido!"

"Crewe is a splendid fellow, señora. Very clever too. I've never met a man I admired so tremendously! He's lived in the Far East for a long time. I believe he's done some remarkable work for his Government, but he won't talk about it."

"Ay de mi!" Elena's lovely mouth drooped. "And me—I look so bad at him last night. I shall say an Ave. He shall come to tea, too. Paula shall make cake, and sorbette. He iss so silent, señor"—there was a delicious sidelong glance—"he does not talk so much as you—" Neil laughed outright.

"Possibly he thinks more—"

"Como no! He iss, married—si?" She was suddenly very busy with the tea cups.

"No, he isn't married," said Neil. She sprang up with a gay little laugh.

"Now you shall see my sala. I have pictures, many things from Spain—si."

His first impression of Elena's sala was one of stiffness, reserve, and chill. The center of the room was a vast empty space, as slippery and polished as glass. The chairs hugged the walls like tall haughty dowagers. The air was musty, stifling.

"But it iss too dark!" cried Elena petulantly. "Paula, aqui!"

Paula came and opened the shell windows. Long rays of late afternoon sun gleamed on wide floor boards, sparkled over heavy inlaid furniture, and

quivered on the paintings around the walls. But still it was gloomy, forbidding, with no sign of comfort anywhere. A stiff unreal background when the girl beside him was hungering for gayety and life. Behind Elena, Paula hovered, her austere brown face still set in suspicious lines; and Neil wandered about, glanced at the pictures carelessly, his hands in his pockets.

In a dark corner of the room there was a little pillared alcove. He walked into it. On the wall was a long portrait of a young Spaniard. A singular face, full of dark charm. He stopped! He stared at it with unbelieving eyes! The surprise was terrific —overwhelming! A curious trembling ran over his body! His heart began to pound! There were the hands, the same white thin hands that had clutched, slipped, and vanished behind the compound wall. There were the eyes that had stared down in an agony of fear at him, in the Kowloon lane. There was the man who had been killed in the Kowloon compound! The man who *owned* the key!

"Señor! Señor!" But he did not hear her. His eyes were on the portrait!

"This man, señora—who *is* he?" His voice was strained, unnatural. Elena stepped back, bewildered.

"But, señor, you are so strange!" She was staring at him. Neil turned, his face was white.

"Who *is* this man, señora? What is his name?"

"But that iss el Señor Delgarda—my husband." Elena looked frightened.

Neil pulled himself together. He glanced around. There were Paula's piercing suspicious eyes. He must get out of here at once. He *couldn't* tell Elena. That was for someone else to do—someone nearer to her. He had to get away—Crewe, the doctor, they must be told that the man who was killed in the Moon Gate, was Elena Delgarda's husband.

"I beg your pardon, señora. The picture gave me a shock. It reminded me of someone I have seen—" Elena's face softened, she smiled sympathetically.

"It iss a memory, veree triste—señor—I see. Come, we go out where it iss cool—we forget—" They walked out on the balcony together. "You will have more tea?" Neil shook his head. He watched the Pasig a moment; along the banks the shadows were deepening.

"Señora, it is getting late. Couldn't I go back by the river?" She looked at him doubtfully.

"Si—but it will take much time. But that is what you want—si?" Her eyes questioned him—he nodded. "Then Paula shall call Felipe—he hass a banca—" They chatted idly for a few moments—while Paula scurried down the wide steps and along the river path. Presently she returned—spoke to her mistress in Spanish and disappeared into the house.

Elena stood on the top step and looked down at him two steps below. He thought the half-tragic haunting sweetness in her face was never more evident.

"I hope, señora, that you will forgive me for breaking in on your siesta. I am not quite myself

to-day, but I thought of you and your kindness—" He was trying to make amends. He wanted to say he remembered her beauty, but probably he'd better not. "You see, when I was in danger I thought of you most." And just as Dr. John had surrendered to the charm of his smile, so did Elena.

"Ay de mi!" smiling back. "You have the smooth tongue, señor. You should be a Spaniard." She sighed a little. "You will come again. There iss Felipe with the banca. Adios, señor."

"Adios." As Neil reached the lower step he heard Paula's distressed voice calling from the sala—

"Señora—Se-ño-ra! It iss a chit from the Señor Mayhew!"

Mayhew! Involuntarily Neil paused, glancing back at Elena. Paula had handed her the chit and was staring up into her mistress's face.

"He iss coming—?" Neil heard her say. Elena read the note hastily—her face looked troubled.

"Si—he comes to-night—soon." She crumpled the chit in her hand, waved to Neil, and hurried into the house with Paula at her heels.

As the banca swung out and down the river, Neil looked back at Elena's hacienda. Above the broken jetty, the tall bamboos, the sedge grass—the old Spanish house with its balconies lifted sharp, desolate outlines against a reddening Eastern sky. Twilight was beginning to wrap the Pasig. As Felipe poled with long powerful strokes around a curve, and the hacienda slowly withdrew into the thin transparency of the evening mists, Neil breathed a little freer. Seeing Ramón Delgarda's picture, and

feeling the sharp sense of tragedy that had reached from the Kowloon compound to Elena's hacienda, had shocked and oppressed him. He was glad to get away. Glad to be going down the river even if it was into danger. On either side the nipa huts and the coco palms were mirrored in the quiet water.

With tropic swiftness all color left the sky. Twinkling lights along the river banks were barrios. He could smell the fumes and see the tiny tongues of flame from charcoal stoves under the nipa huts. As Felipe stood in the end of the banca and poled, he hummed a Spanish tune. He had taken his big straw hat off, and in the dusk Neil thought he looked a little like a gondolier. Then night—thick, black, velvety—had fallen. It was a slow passage down the river. Although Neil realized the danger of being in the Walled City before dark, it had seemed interminable! Finally they drifted under the last one of the white stone bridges, and when Felipe poled up alongside the maze of cascos, and bancas near the Walled City Neil looked at his watch.

After seven!

## CHAPTER XVI

NEIL had missed the most charming hour in Manila. At five o'clock all the world was abroad. Fresh breezes were blowing from the Cavite; gold and crimson clouds floated across the sunset sky; from patios and courtyards people were drifting to clubs and hotels, to drink tea and cocktails, to flirt and to dance. Bridge and Mah Jong tables were being formed on wide verandas, glasses clinked above the hum of voices. On the Luneta, that wide strip of green across which the Army and Navy Club stares at the wide spreading Manila Hotel, the Constabulary Band was playing in a high pagoda. Little calesas dashed madly about; automobiles were parked in a double row along the breakwater, where people sat and watched the sunset. It was that gay and shining hour between tea time and dinner, which white people in the tropics think of with affection.

Women in filmy frocks, officers in white uniforms, were dancing on the porches of the Army and Navy Club; in the Manila Hotel tea was being served and cocktails drunk. An air of festivity, a buoyant spirit which is one of the charms of these Islands was everywhere apparent. Fans waved, the sound of light chatter and laughter filled the lobby and the tearoom which adjoined it,

barefooted Filipino boys swarmed, and at the sound of clapping hands came running and sliding over the floors bringing varicolored drinks.

In a corner of the tearoom under a shadowing palm, Gerald Mayhew watched the crowd. He was in immaculate whites, his red face cleanly shaven, his hair damp as if he had just come from his shower. His shirt was blue, so were his socks, and the hem of a blue handkerchief peeped from his coat-pocket. In any of the Port towns where Mayhew was known, it was admitted that he always looked like a gentleman, even if he wasn't one.

His experienced eye roved over the people in the long tearoom. Beads of sweat stood on his forehead; his glance shifted from the brilliantly colored groups inside to the open window where he could see a constant stream of calesas and motor cars roll up, discharge their passengers, and roll away. Mayhew was wating for Ten Yen but he was in an ugly mood. It had been a day of nerve-racking disappointment. He wished he could chuck it and take the next boat for Singapore, and leave Ten Yen to pull it off alone. But he couldn't—there was too much at stake, and there was something else which he had never really analyzed, that held him fast, the grip of Ten Yen's will. And Ten Yen's revenge, which he had seen in execution more than once, was awe inspiring. His interview with the Small One was bound to be as unpleasant as the devil, but he'd have to stick it out. Mayhew knew just how cold that thin ascetic face could turn,

how hard the fathomless black eyes could look when confronted with bad news.

But Ten Yen was late! While Mayhew stared at the blithering gossiping crowd, swallowing innumerable cold drinks, and dancing inanely—dancing, in this climate, at this hour—he shoved up his sleeve and looked at his wrist watch. Where the hell was Ten Yen—he was fifteen minutes late! Mayhew fumed, running a finger inside his hot collar. The harbor water had been choppy all day, so he might have been delayed getting in from the *Che Kiang*. Then suddenly Ten Yen was there—sitting calmly across the table from him, his yellow face as cool and immobile as usual. He looked as if the day had not been hot, as if things had not gone awry, as if worry did not sit, like a pale ghost, in the offing.

"How did you get in? You're late! I've been watching the door for thirty minutes." Ten Yen's sleeve fan fluttered gently, he had glanced twice around the room; it was enough.

"Through the garden—fewer eyes to see."

"Huh, you always manage, don't you? Have they changed the signals?" Mayhew leaned forward.

"No, Number Three is up." The high color in Mayhew's face deepened as Ten Yen turned his scrutinizing eyes on him. "My friend, you know something. Speak!"

"I know a little, but it's been one hell of a day. Here, boy!" Mayhew clapped his hands and a boy came running. "One tea—Jasmine; one dry Martini. Anything to eat, Ten Yen? No? Sandwiches

for one. I'm eatin'—" Ten Yen's eyes scanned the great room with its big beautiful Chinese lanterns, its crowded tea table, its mixed chattering throngs of men and women. He sniffed with distaste the heavy odors of French perfume, mingled with the aroma of tea, talcum powder, and tropical flowers. He did not often enter a place like this hotel, but when he did it was with mingled feelings of amazement and aversion.

"I found out last night that he'd been in the Hotel Mindora, but he was gone when I went to his room. I've traced him all over this hot town, and missed him every time. He's either infernally clever, or he leads a charmed life." Mayhew's tone was rasping. The Chinese eyebrows lifted.

"Speak lower!"

Mayhew spoke lower, telling him what had happened at the Mindora. And Ten Yen listened, sipping the cup of tea his Filipino waiter had brought, studying Mayhew's face, as he talked—studying things unknown to Mayhew.

"The tea"—Ten Yen set his cup down with disdain—"would make a Hung Mao's head go round like a bamboo wheel. So, and then?"

"I don't know. Somebody must have warned him. He *must* have been warned! There were two people in his room at the Mindora last night. I went back this afternoon, but the damned mestizo didn't know a thing!"

"He can be bought?" The fingers of Ten Yen's left hand tapped his ivory fan.

"Like a shot! I went to Ah Sing's. Had to talk

to him on the street, because there was an Englishman tucked away in his alcove. He stared at me as if he knew something. As if he knew too much, by God! But I never saw him before. Ah Sing said his name was Crewe—d'ye know him?"

"No." Ten Yen was watching the barefooted boy arrange a small glass dish of pili nuts on the table. "Why stab at swallows in the grass?"

"Well," said Mayhew, knitting his eyebrows, "you'd better remember his name. He's a damned cocky sort. I-own-the-earth-and-who-are-you kind. I'd like to punch his face, but he's not 'swallows.' He looked as if he knew something." Mayhew was puzzled, but Ten Yen dismissed it with a gesture.

Mayhew drank his cocktail, then leaned back in his chair and watched the Chinese mask across the table. Impossible to know what Ten Yen was thinking. Impossible to know what impression his news had made on him. Whenever he liked, Ten Yen had that curious ability to cast a circle of silence about himself, and now he was as far away from this chattering gay crowd as if he were out on the deck of the *Che Kiang*. Hidden under the palms they were inconspicuous enough, though occasionally a woman nodded to Mayhew, or a red-faced Britisher called "Hello—" All of them cast curious glances at Ten Yen. Men of all colors and races, wearing bizarre costumes, were frequent enough in the shifting life of this great hotel, but there was a quality about Ten Yen's little figure in its fluttering black cloak that set him apart.

"Ten Yen—the American went to a white doctor. A man Ah Sing knows. I'm beginning to think there's something queer about this job. Whenever we strike it seems to help this fellow. Have you thought of that? If he hadn't been hurt, he wouldn't have gone to a white doctor, would he? He'd have been in the Mindora last night. And it was your captain who got him in the gate."

"Shih—I have thought."

But for the first time since he came in, Ten Yen looked startled.

He sat gazing at the center piece of raspberry-colored lotus, pushed open by human hands to show their hearts. This premature blossoming annoyed him. Outside, in the gay little pagoda, the Constabulary Band was playing "The Wearing of the Green" and the music mingled with the faint roll and swish of the incoming tide. Mayhew noticed a slim girl in pale blue threading her way between the tables and coming toward them. Her head was particularly alert and her eyes matched her frock. Her walk was British. Ripping girl! Mayhew looked at her hard for a moment and then forgot her.

Leaning closer, he described Ah Sing's visit to the white doctor's house. "The American kicked Ah Sing down the stairs. After he had picked himself up and put salve on his face, he came to me."

Ten Yen's face wore an expression that boded ill for Ah Sing.

"Ah Sing missed him; Ling missed him in the Moon Gate; the captain missed him by the old wall—that is *three,*" he said stonily.

"Well, we combed the Walled City, Ah Sing and I. But that American's disappeared just as if these hot pavements had swallowed him. We've seen cocheros, we've bribed house-boys, we've set a guard around that doctor's house, but it's been empty. Not a soul there, empty as a tomb all day—nothing!"

Ten Yen tapped the fingers of his left hand with the ivory sticks of his fan. His eyes were remote, thoughtful.

"Three times the net is spread—three times he walks into it—three times he walks out! There is something!" he murmured.

And Mayhew was silent for a moment. He was uneasy at the look in Ten Yen's eyes. He wondered if superstition had begun to work in the Chinese brain. Wasn't there some kind of mystical significance about the number three? Was Ten Yen afraid of *that?*—Ten Yen, who was afraid of nothing? Hell!—the thing was beginning to haunt him!

"You're damned right, he's walked out of it," laughing uneasily. "Filthy little devil—that Ramón—to get us in a mess like this. I wish I'd strung him up by his high-heeled boots, Ten Yen—I never liked him. He was too silky.— And there's Elena—" Mayhew's eyes narrowed.

A mocking cynical look came into the face watching Mayhew across the table.

"Shih! You like Ramón. But now—his tea is spilt! That Spanish woman, Mayhew, she must be watched!" His tea is spilt! It was that little phrase Ten Yen so often used. He had gone off into one of his abstractions now, and sat staring at his tea cup. Mayhew left him alone. Through the window there was the Luneta, bathed in illusive rosy light. —Ten Yen's pie-shaped hat and sallow Chinese face outlined against it. But in the next minute, the rosy light had faded—the sun had dropped into the Yellow Sea, leaving massed black clouds behind it.

The glaring headlights of motor cars and the twinkling twin lamps of calesas began shifting back and forth on the Luneta, while the famous Constabulary Band, conducted by an American negro, struck into a Strauss waltz. Mayhew observed that the good-looking British girl was having tea quite by herself. In a country where pretty women were as scarce and precious as this year's Derby winner, Mayhew thought it a strange arrangement. Her glance had once or twice wandered toward their table and met his bold one, but she had quickly looked away—and Mayhew grinned. The tropics hadn't warmed up her blue eyes! Then suddenly he remembered.

"By the way, Ten Yen, I found this in the American's room. It's only a pocket map of the Walled City—" He tossed it on the table.

The slender clawlike Chinese fingers slowly opened it. A slip of paper inside the map dropped out. Ten Yen picked it up—held it spread open

between his fingers, and his face began to change. As far as Mayhew could see the paper was only a page torn from an old *Illustrated London News.* What was there about that? But as Ten Yen studied it, his sensitive face looked more shrunken—more yellow—more like a death's-head every instant. Mayhew was horrified!

"For God's sake, you look as if you'd seen a ghost! Ten Yen!" Only once before had Mayhew seen him look like that—and then! "What's wrong?"

"Look!" The ivory sticks pushed the paper slowly across the table. Mayhew examined it hurriedly; then suddenly his large white hands, covered with fine blond hairs, began to shake.

"Hell!" His voice was only a whisper as he stared at Ten Yen.

"Shih!" Ten Yen nodded—his voice only a whisper too. "The American *knows!*" As he gazed at Ten Yen, Mayhew's long figure sprawled in his chair and Ten Yen stared down at the pattern in his tea cup.

The next instant Ten Yen's warning hand was raised as the little Filipino waiter came to their table—

"Señor," he said, "there iss a Chino in a calesa —waiting to speak with you."

"It's Ah Sing," said Mayhew. He rose, thrusting the paper into his pocket. Ten Yen, with his fluttering hands and shrinking gestures, followed him, stepping softly among the tables. Ten Yen who,

when every one else gave up, flicked an eyelid and began to fight!

The band had stopped playing; people were sauntering out of the tearoom—going home to dress for dinner parties and dances. Empty glasses stood on some of the tables—in the great dining room that flanked the tearoom and opened on three sides to the beautiful bay, Filipino boys were busily preparing for dinner.

Along a rather narrow hall at one side of the tearoom there was a secluded little entrance. They hurried through it, and walked on down into the garden. At the place where the great driveway curves out of the boulevard was Ah Sing's calesa, and Mayhew beckoned to him. Ah Sing's blue-clad figure climbed out with difficulty, for he was sore and stiff. As he waddled toward them they saw his face was smeared with grease and one puffy eye was almost closed. Both eyes carefully avoided the fleeting, contemptuous glance of Ten Yen.

The three men walked down to a corner of the breakers not far from the hotel. It was a dark corner. The lights from the great hotel glimmered behind them dimly, and below them spread like a picture in the night lay the crescent curve of Manila Bay—colored—afire with reflected lights from so many moving ships. The water was rough—great waves rolled in and threw the white spray almost in their faces. A stiff breeze blew in from the ocean.

"Found him?" queried Mayhew.

"No—Amelican gone—but Dr. John—him go to Spanish Customs—talkee—talkee long time." He looked at Ten Yen once, then looked away. Ah Sing could barely see the set cold face against the black night, and the dancing lights on big and little boats in the harbor.

"The American's arm is sick," said Ten Yen suddenly, "he will not go to the half caste hotel—no. He goes to the white doctor to sleep. Happiness and trouble stand once at every gate—shih; but only trouble stands at his gate to-night."

Ah Sing glanced uneasily at the dim fluttering cloak from which the voice proceeded. Was *he* the trouble that would stand at the doctor's gate to-night?

"What is your plan, Ten Yen?" asked Mayhew.

"Ah Sing," said Ten Yen, turning to him, "you have no courage—but you may have knowledge. Speak!"

"Dr. John, him go to Spanish Customs. Dr. John find out about *Che Kiang,*" explained Ah Sing. "My fliend is in Customs. Dr. John say freighter, what kind?—tons, how many?—cargo—how much? you see?—Too belly damn much talkee—talkee—"

"You're right," said Mayhew, "too bally much. What d'ye suppose he knows? Damned interfering little Yankee. The American has told him something." Ah Sing glanced across at the little figure listening and standing so still, hesitated—and then—

"Number Four signal he go up!" said Ah Sing shortly. There was a perceptible start in the tall

white and in the little black shape standing beside him. Mayhew's right fist struck his left palm a sudden blow.

"Damnation!" he shouted.

"Ah Sing—when?" It was a new sharp tone from Ten Yen.

"Night signal—him go up when I pass station in Walled City—" explained Ah Sing.

"The last bitter drop of tea is in the cup, Mayhew." The cry was from Ten Yen.

Ten Yen turned, his body was stiff, taut. His face was not set and cold now, it was fiery, livid, evil. Energy flared and seethed in every sensitized atom, even the end of his black cloak, the tips of his pointing fingers, threw some vibratory shock into the night air. Ah Sing took a step backward, appalled, staring, while Mayhew who had seen this phenomenon before, but had never got used to it, turned white under his tan. No man could stand against Ten Yen when he was keyed up to this point.

"Ah Sing, get three more men! Before midnight trouble enters that doctor's gate. Mayhew, three times have the others failed—but to-night you do not fail! By dawn the *Che Kiang* is ready. We go to Borneo. The key, the American, will be on board the *Che Kiang*. If he is dead"—there was a peculiar bright light in Ten Yen's eyes—"shih—dead men see farthest."

But Mayhew's glance had been sweeping back and forth over the winking, bobbing red, green, and white lights of the warships in the harbor.

"It's our only chance—but this isn't China, Ten Yen. We run risks. There are those Yankee warships!" Mayhew looked worried. Ten Yen's longer range swept over the warships out into the night. It went straight as a bird flies to where the far-off flash of the Cavite light reddened the black sky. It went on out beyond Cavite, behind Cavite, to a cove. And his mind, traveling like the great wind, over vast distances, saw how this thing was already done—was ended.

"The *Che Kiang,*" said Ten Yen—his long thin arm, from which his black coat billowed and fell away, pointing toward the Cavite light—"The *Che Kiang* comes in—to-night!"

## CHAPTER XVII

PAULA, Elena's Tagalog maid, stood by the balcony railing and stared across the darkening Pasig. Lights were beginning to shine in the barrios opposite the hacienda, smoke went up from the slanting vine-covered nipa huts; an orange moon shone through the stiff leaves of the palm trees. She could see a charcoal fire in Felipe's banca near the jetty. And she could look down on the bamboo, which had been thinned for the market until only its delicate tracery stood against the sky. Paula's fingers fumbled for the "anting-anting" she wore inside her dress. The wind was rising—evil spirits traveled among the treetops. Strange events were happening in the old casa, and Paula was not only disturbed, she was much afraid. Her lips moved—forming the words "Ave Maria Santísima!"—and she crossed herself constantly.

A chit had come from el Señor Mayhew earlier in the evening. Paula had not liked it—it meant trouble. Always there had been a beast in the eyes of the very large Englishman when he looked at her mistress. And Paula's knowledge of the passions of men was wide. She had learned many lessons in the crowded promiscuous life of the nipa huts and she knew that brown and white were the same, under their skins. She did not trust el Señor Mayhew.

Nor had she liked the easy familiarity of the boy who brought the message. He had made insulting remarks about the hacienda—calling it "melancólica"! He had worn a white collar and his shirt had been tucked inside his starched white trousers. Ába! A bobo! Paula despised him. One thing, however, had startled and distressed her. The great storm, he said, was hovering; flags and lights in Intramuros to the number of five were up. It was the danger signal! Paula had lived in Tondo where the nipa huts felt the full force of the great wind; and destruction—famine—death—followed the typhoon. Ave Maria Santísima! The poor people. When the typhoon blew Paula prayed and trembled as she was doing now.

But he could not be prayed away—this evil spirit of an el Señor Mayhew because already she had spent hours on him. Why was he coming here? What did he want? From the day Señor Ramón, her master, met the tall Englishman sorrow had walked. Those were the evil days! Paula remembered nights of revel for Ramón; nights of sorrow for Elena; nights which Paula had spent by the shrine in the señora's bedroom praying to the Virgin of Antipolo. There was nothing greater—not even the Lord God—than the Virgin of Antipolo! But el Señor Mayhew was like one who would spit on the Holy Ghost of a Good Friday! A man without shame—or heart. A bold man! It was Paula who had brought her mistress away to this old hacienda on the Pasig. She remembered the anger of el Señor Ramón—the eyes of that devil el

Señor Mayhew watching her mistress. And now, he was coming here, to this remote and lonely casa! Paula slipped a furtive hand inside her dress—then she went into the sala.

Closing the windows on the west she lighted the tall shaded lamps, then walked over to the portrait of the Señor Ramón and looked at it with malefic eyes for a long time. He had the beautiful face, yes; the look—the ways—for women. Paula hated him. He had forced them to come to this lonely hacienda and living here had made her señora triste. Paula could have spat on the picture of Ramón; once or twice she had, but she must carefully wipe it off again. What had the Americano seen in the picture?—why should he have looked as if the dead had risen before him? Oh, unmistakably he had been shocked—si. Paula had seen his face. Something was wrong, something that would bear watching. But she had liked that Americano, with his so-friendly laugh—and the dollar bill he had given her. Her fingers touched it hidden in her bosom. Yes, she had liked him.

She looked out into the dark garden. "Gecko-gecko—" called a little animal voice from the tall trees. "Gecko-gecko—" said Paula, mocking the tree lizard. From the bamboos by the river she heard the cry of the sad bird.

"Paula!" The old woman shuffled down the balcony and through the wide high doors leading to her mistress's bedroom. Before she entered she took a hasty look at the sky. The moon was still yellow, reflected in a path of gold on the Pasig, but in the

west massed clouds were very black, and Paula shook her head. In the bedroom, her señora was dressing for the evening.

"My frock, Paula, fasten it!"

"Si, señora—" The Filipina buttoned with deft fingers, then stood back to admire her mistress. The white frock—the long ruby earrings—were gone; vanished with them was the wistful girl of the afternoon. Here was a regal little figure in black lace touched with brilliants. Diamonds in her small ears; her dark hair piled like a coronet on top of her head above a cold Spanish face. Elena was bringing all the outward trappings to help her through a doubtful experience. "Ave Maria Santísima!" murmured Paula, with a deep breath of admiration. Who, looking at her now, would molest the señora?—

"Que bonita, señora!"

"Paula, you stay veree close," said Elena, eying her significantly.

Paula nodded, opening her frock to show a glittering little knife.

"As the muchacho watches his fighting cock—so will I watch el Señor Mayhew," she said in Spanish.

"Bueno." Elena took a great black fan from the velvet-covered dressing table and stared at herself in the long mirror. She was puzzled and anxious. What was behind this visit of Mayhew's? She had not seen him for weeks until this morning in the Manila Hotel when he had been insultingly familiar. If she had refused to see him? But he would

have come anyway! Dios! how he was of a boldness! And living up in this triste hacienda—so remote—what could one expect? With Delgarda Casa let to strangers—and Ramón here—there—anywhere in the country or in China—and veree little money—what could one do? Elena was not a coward. She had the fighting spirit of generations of Spanish Illustrados in her blood. If she had wrinkled, fierce Paula with her she would fight—if she had to. But she had learned long ago in the stately old casas of Manila—in the clubs—in the gay hotels—even in Malacañang, that her beauty was a magnet which irresistibly drew bad men, as well as good.

Staring in the mirror—watching the picture of her long slim blackness and creamy pallor, all glittering with brilliants—Elena thought of the reticent shy señor whose face had said so much. The silent Señor Crewe had liked her—si. And she had liked the tall, blond English Illustrado. He had distinction. Yet she had been so rude! It was not the fault of these English that they were in Delgarda Casa. It was the fault of Ramón. A sudden fury of rage shook her. These three nice people she had met should be her friends; she should be visiting with them—dancing with the grave señor at the Manila Hotel or the Polo Club; she should be happy—gay—full of the joy of life when there is only one to live! Not living here, with old Paula.

"Señora, he iss here," whispered Paula. "Señora!" A motor car swept up the drive—sending reflections of lights into the bedroom windows.

"Paula, remember?"

"Si, señora, I remember," said the small black shape.

Elena waited until she heard Mayhew's heavy step on the stairs, then she walked slowly along the balcony to the great sala doors. Mayhew had come in very quietly. She stood a moment looking at him. He was in the middle of the sala staring about with bold, interested eyes. But when he saw her—

"Buenas tardes, Elena," he said, holding out his hand. "You are looking very lovely." His voice was suave. Elena stared, her head on one side, her eyes puzzled. This was not the Mayhew she was accustomed to. She had never seen him polite and deferential.

Tall, a superbly healthy animal, Mayhew stood there, in white evening clothes, groomed to the last degree of perfection. The red blood was close to his freshly shaven cheeks—his hair was smooth—there was a wholesome odor of fine tobacco and toilet water about him.

"Buenas tardes," said Elena, noting all this, but watching him warily as she gave him the tips of cold little fingers.

"See here"—smiling—"be a little friendly. I've come with important news, Elena."

"Nothing you can ever say to me, señor—iss important." Elena waved her black fan and stood still in the doorway. He was staring at the brilliants on her black frock—at her sparkling diamond earrings—her brilliant sparkling little face—and

something burned deep behind his eyes. Hidden in the dark doorway, not more than ten feet away from him, Paula saw it. So! she thought, looks the house cat's eyes—when he sees my bleeding heart dove inside the little wicker cage!

"Elena," said Mayhew seriously, "you must remember that you're a quite enchanting person. If men lose their heads, now and then, what can you expect?"

"What iss it you want, señor? We will not talk about me." Elena's low voice was perfectly controlled. "You may sit down, for one moment onlee."

"It's about Ramón." Instantly her face changed, she flushed.

"You will not speak of Ramón to me, señor. I do not care to know what he iss doing now. I am not interest in anything that iss about you or Ramón. No! It will be something veree bad—si!"

"I'm afraid you'll have to listen, Elena"—firmly. The tone startled her.

"He hass done something"—involuntarily—"something, what you say, of bad honor—infamado?" anxiously.

"No—no—" Mayhew's prominent eyes held hers for a moment—"certainly not. He never will again. Ramón is dead." For a breathless moment she stared at him, her eyes enormous, then she sprang to her feet.

"That you dare!" furiously—"that you should lie! Now you shall go—I do not listen any more!"

"Elena!" Mayhew held up a protesting hand. "Don't! My God—it's true!"

"It iss impossible to believe you." Elena came very close, watching him with her disconcerting eyes. "Always you lie. It iss impossible that Ramón iss dead! You are going to show me a something, what you say—a proof—I do not believe you—no."

"Here," said Mayhew curtly. "He gave these to me before he died. Told me to see that they reached you, said he was sorry." He was incoherent, mumbling a little. "Ramón never meant to be a rotter—" No proof that he could have given her would have been so conclusive as these private papers of Ramón's. One by one they fluttered from her fingers to the floor. His scapular, records of the sugar hacienda, little personal trinkets, he carried in his pockets. The topaz amulet Elena had given him a long time ago. She stood still, looking at it; she was white, quiet—Ramón was dead; yes, it was true. This time Mayhew had not lied!

"The love, señor—it iss what you call—kill in me—" said Elena after a moment. "I do not love him—no; but he iss Ramón Delgarda—he iss my husband—he iss—o—oh—Paula!"

"Si, señora—" The little scowling Filipina appeared promptly, too promptly. Mayhew looked at her hard.

"Paula—he iss dead! el Señor Ramón! el pobrecito!" Pity filled Elena's voice—and her great eyes. Paula crossed herself, then she caught her señora's hand and kissed it.

"Que malo—que malo—!" Her dark brows were demanding why Señor Mayhew lingered now his

bad news had been told? "I take care of you—alma mia—"

"And how does he die?" asked Elena, fixing her black eyes on Mayhew.

"Of Oriental fever in Hong Kong—a few days ago—" Mayhew looked embarrassed. "Only a few hour's illness, Elena—" He walked over to the sala door and stood looking out on the Pasig. It was more unpleasant—harder—a damn sight worse than he thought it would be!

When he looked around he saw a curious picture; Elena and Paula had dropped to their knees and with the simplicity of children they had bent their two black heads and crossed themselves in front of Ramón's picture.

Mayhew turned his head away quickly and stared at the slow-moving Pasig, at the dim fires in the barrios across the river, at the wind bending the tree tops—the big wind sweeping in from the Yellow Sea. He, too, heard "Gecko-gecko—"; he thought of the *Che Kiang* out there—and wondered how long this business would take him.

After a moment Elena joined him by the door.

"You have given me Ramón's papers—yess. My thanks, señor. But where iss the key—?"

"Ramón gave it to Ten Yen to take care of," said Mayhew regretfully.

"Ten Yen?" knitting her brows. "Ten Yen?—but why should he have the Delgarda key, señor?"

"He was a friend of Ramón's—he was the last person with Ramón, you see, before he died," said Mayhew smoothly.

"Si, I haf heard Ramón talk of him, a great Chinese lord; why does he not send the key?"

Mayhew nodded;—there was an odd light in his eyes—

"He's a great lord in China—yes; but he won't give the key to any one but you, Elena. He says it's a sacred trust—that sort of thing. You know how the Chinese are about family heirlooms—family traditions. He means to be very decent about it." Mayhew was pleased with himself, he thought he was pulling this off rather well.

Elena stared—she was ethereally lovely in the misty unreal light, and back of her Paula watched Mayhew with a fixed suspicious stare.

"Do you mean, señor—that I—Elena Delgarda —must *go* for it?" Elena drew her glittering little figure up.

"It's the old Delgarda key, Elena. Ramón wouldn't let it out of his sight. Now it belongs to *you*. If you want it, I'm afraid you'll have to go to Ten Yen, Elena." Mayhew's voice was apologetic. "He's a queer sort, great idea of his own dignity and that. *He* never goes to any one—Ten Yen!"

Elena considered this; about the great lord—who never went to any one. That appealed to her. She knew, with quite definite distinctness, how that great lord felt! And the key! The most sacred of all the Delgarda possessions—to be in the hands of a stranger—a Chinaman! No—never. Elena was a Delgarda of a remote line, herself. She had seen the key—once. Ramón had defied family tradition

and she remembered its beauty—its unusual shape —its jewels. For three hundred years it had never been out of Delgarda hands! Certainly—she must get the Delgarda key!

"Where iss this Señor Ten Yen?" asked Elena abruptly.

Mayhew looked back to the river—his eyes glittered a little, but his face was white. It was too easy, by God! It was like taking ha'pennies from children!

"In his hotel, in the Walled City. I'll take you —my motor's outside. Run you back in an hour, you know. Ramón would want you to have the key, Elena."

He did not see—and neither did Elena—the queer look that sprang into Paula's face when she heard that.

"Si," said Elena thoughtfully. "I think I go with you—si—Ramón would wish me to have the key. But—it iss going to rain—I get my hat—my scarf. You will excuse me, señor?" She ran down the balcony with Paula at her heels—but in the bedroom the little Filipina faced her resolutely.

"Where you go, señora?"

"With the Señor Mayhew—I get—" she stopped and looked at Paula. "I get something of your señor's. It is a thing I *must* have. My scarf—how it will rain!"

But Paula did not move.

"Where *iss* this thing?"

"Intramuros—" Elena was putting on her hat. "In an hour, Paula—I am back."

"No—no, señora. I see hiss eyes—they have no truth—you do not come back—no."

"I course I come—bobo!" Elena threw the light scarf about her shoulders.

"Señora—I go with you?—si?" Paula was sobbing. Elena considered this, but then dismissed it. In a motor car so early in the evening?— With people and lights? Of course, she was safe—and there was the key. The key—of the Delgardas!

"It iss an hour onlee, Paula. You will watch for me—by the gate?"

She ran down the balcony, to Mayhew waiting in the sala doors.

With fear like ice in her heart Paula saw her go. Then down the great curving driveway she ran with the wind beating in her face; singing through her big transparent sleeves; wrapping her long skirt tight about her, until she stumbled and fell. At the iron gates she stopped, gasping. She saw the big car turn, and flash away in the direction of Manila —its red tail-light winking like an evil eye. Then it was lost in the shadows of the winding road.

She looked up at the sky. Dios! how black! Soon those massed clouds like the great mysterious bat flight of Montalban would hide the moon! Above her head the fantastic iron gates swayed and clinked —drops of water began to run down the old stones. It was one of those tropical storms that would pass as swiftly as it came. The damp wind whistled through the bamboos but Paula, her eyes fixed on that road to Manila, crouched—and trembled and waited—"Ay de mi—que malo—que malo!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER Neil had dismissed Felipe, he walked slowly along the flagstones. Here was the same unsavory waterfront that he had seen the night before—with its bleak warehouse, its tall blurred white statue, its blind walls where ragged vines were swaying in the wind. He would have to enter that dark unlucky gate with its arched masonry—only this time, he would be ready. As long as he was in the Walled City nobody would catch him off guard again! He looked for the Chinese launch among the mat-covered bancas and the big cascos tied up by the river, but he didn't see it. He looked at the great yellow moon drifting majestically; but the moon was not so good, it only intensified the shadows! A hot breathlessness was in the air—it felt like storm. He wondered if it would be possible to get back unperceived to the doctor's house? . . . He would be lucky if he could! Walking warily through the gate, he struck off down the streets.

The Walled City was dining, and everybody knew it! He could see Chinamen gathered about the big common bowls of rice, and in the open shops Filipinos were chattering and eating. He hugged the outside of the pavements and eyed the passers-by. Walking quickly he turned into the street where the

doctor lived. Down its dim length street lamps were set far apart and there were the long low white houses with their bulging Spanish balconies. A sign on the corner house said that this was Calle Lara— In spite of the danger that might strike at any moment, the strange Latin atmosphere of Calle Lara sent him back instantly to the hacienda and the portrait of Ramón. He stood there a moment—thinking—listening—watching—

The grimy street lamps on their long iron arms threw yellow rays over the blind houses; the big moon struck the square towers of Santa Maria, but its patios and cloisters were as inky black as caverns. He wondered where Ten Yen and Mayhew were? And what those devils were up to? Although no one was in sight and there was nobody either in windows or doorways, he felt that eyes were on him. Around every dark corner—behind every old iron gate—peering from each dusky window, he could feel eyes, scanning—scrutinizing—watching! He glanced up at the wall along the side of old Santa Maria—something moved up there! A dark bent figure ran stealthily along the top. Neil came to a dead stop—and stared. Even a nervous imagination does not invent a man doubled like a jackknife and slipping along a high stone wall.

He hurried on, and at the tall iron gates before the doctor's house, he hesitated. The house was dark, but it would be; for only the bedrooms fronted the street. If the doctor was at home, he would be sitting in the sala, which faced the patio.

Behind the gates stretched the long dark hated

passage, arched and gloomy like catacombs. He looked around—behind. He glanced at the quiet street. Was it more dangerous to go in—or to stay out? Queer—his certainty that eyes were on him. He peered again into the passage; this time he noticed that a light had been placed on the landing—it threw a dull glow down the stairs. That decided him. He flung the gates open and raced along the passage to the shelter of the stairway.

"Hello, up there!" he called.

Hurried movements in the sala—a chair banged.

"Hello—hello!" The doctor's excited voice came down to him.

Neil took the dark steps three at a time and collided with the doctor at the top.

"Santa Maria!" snapped Dr. John. "Where in thunder have you been?"

Cecil Crewe, with his eyes closed, had been stretched in one of the long wicker chairs. He had looked at his watch, and he and the doctor had decided that it was time to go to the Governor-General's—they wouldn't wait any longer. And then Neil's call suddenly came up the stairs—and with the doctor's surprised answer Crewe came to his feet with a bound. There was Neil, standing tense, breathless, by the table—his brown eyes brilliant—his face scarlet with heat and excitement—and for a moment Crewe stared.

"I say, Winton—where *have* you been?"

Crewe felt the quick unreasoning anger of a man who has been under a strain and finds it was useless. For hours he had been anxiously bobbing

about in an open launch under the tropic sun, hunting for this chap who had suddenly turned up with a whole skin and looking most uncommonly alive. Crewe was white and haggard himself; nerves frayed almost to the breaking point.

"Why didn't you leave some word? We've been hours hunting for you. The doctor's been in and out at the Customs all day in the heat, and he's about done in. Why didn't you send a chit? Where were *you,* Winton?"

Neil looked from one excited face to the other and flushed.

"I've been way up on the Pasig. I *couldn't* get word to you! I'm sorry you've been worried, but I've had an astounding experience, simply incredible! Now I know who the man was that was murdered in Ten Yen's compound!" Crewe took a quick step toward him—his eyes keen, searching.

"What the devil do you mean?" His face looked startled. "Who was it?" Neil gazed back at him steadily.

"It was the señora's husband! It was Ramón Delgarda!" he said slowly.

"Ramón Delgarda? You're dreaming—you're crazy!" exploded the doctor, who had been listening very intently. "He's down at his hacienda in the country." Neil saw incredulity in both faces.

"You don't believe me, do you?" he said seriously. "Well, it's true! Don't you suppose I *know* what I'm talking about? D'ye think I could *forget* the man I saw killed in Ten Yen's compound? For God's sake, what do you think I am?" Crewe took

another step toward him, studying him keenly. Neil had changed in a few hours. During his years in the Far East he had seen many other men alter suddenly after startling crises.

"Where did you find this out?" he asked sternly.

"I saw his portrait."

"But that's up at Elena's old hacienda—I've seen it a dozen times!" sputtered the doctor, limping about the room in his excitement. "Why, how could *you* see it?"

"Have *you* been to the señora's hacienda?" Crewe's tone had an edge. There was tumult in his mind. Ramón Delgarda! Elena's husband! Was this story true? Could it be true? Something that beat and hummed in his brain filled him with dismay. Mixed with it was a sudden unreasoning jealousy of this good-looking chap who had been with Elena while he, Crewe, had hunted for him during the long hot hours of the afternoon. How long had he been there? Why had he gone? And what had she told him? His blue eyes were cold and hard as he faced Neil.

"What were you doing in Elena's hacienda?" At the tone the doctor swung round to watch him.

"Wait, Crewe—I couldn't have done a better thing!"

"Did you see the portrait there?"

"Yes—in her sala! I knew it at once! Knew it the moment I saw it! Same dark good-looking man whose hands I saw over the wall. No question about it—there he was!"

Neil glanced at their two disturbed faces, then

stared over at the fern-filled window—but Crewe doubted if he saw it. He had a strange expression; some of the color had drained away from his face. He looked as Crewe had seen him that night in the Hotel Mindora when he told him about the murder in Kowloon. Crewe knew that in the tropics men reacted in very singular ways to their experiences—and yet—

Ramón killed in Ten Yen's compound! But was that possible? Crewe's mind jumped at it—for if it were true— Then he forced that thought away as utterly unworthy of him. Could Neil be sure, just seeing a portrait? Mightn't he be deceived? Couldn't it have been some other dark good-looking Spaniard? After all, that was a fairly black night in Kowloon, and a fairly dim outline above Ten Yen's wall. Crewe's mind turned it over, encompassing various aspects of the situation. He weighed—even rejected in his heart he knew that what Neil had said was probably true. Elena, then, was free, and the dangerous key belonged to her.

"If Ramón has been murdered, Elena owns the key!" Crewe's tone was one of finality. "You didn't leave it with her, did you?"

"I certainly had more sense than to do that" Neil smiled a little wryly. "I didn't even tell her —about Ramón, you know. As soon as I'd pulled myself together I got away—and came down to tell you. Now—what's to be done? Elena owns the key, but if Ten Yen and Mayhew know she has it—" Crewe's fair face flushed, his eyes were steely.

"She must never get it!"

He felt a kind of horror when he thought of Elena, triste, lovely, owning a key so dangerous that many men might have been killed for it. Neil could defend himself, but what would Ten Yen and Mayhew do to her? He wondered if she knew about it? If he could help it, she should never have it! And suddenly the key, a symbol in itself of beauty, had become the most sinister and important thing in the world to Cecil Crewe.

"I want to see that key—it seems to make such a damned lot of trouble!" said the doctor testily. "What made you go up to the hacienda in the first place?"

"Ah Sing was right at my heels! I had to get out of here quick, didn't have a chance to send a chit!"

"Then it *was* Ah Sing?" said Crewe, looking at the doctor.

"Then he *did* get Angelo!" interjected the doctor.

"Angelo—Angelo?" cried Neil, bewildered.

"I've lost Angelo!" The doctor's tone was inconsolable. "Angelo must have told Ah Sing you were here. Crewe and I forgot to warn him! Neil, I wish your infernal key was in Manila Bay—why don't you show it to me?"

Neil felt in his pocket and slowly drew out the beautifully inlaid box. Glancing about covertly, he walked over to the corner and stood with his back to the window.

"Come here, Dr. John." Close together like two conspirators they bent over it, and as the doctor

in the shadow of his white coat examined it he uttered a long low whistle of surprise.

"Jupiter! It's gorgeous! And Spanish—that's not a French crest! Crewe said you thought it was. No, no—that might have been made here in the Walled City. I wonder if Elena has ever seen it?" He was turning it over in his hands, fascinated by its beauty. Crewe came to stare over their shoulders.

"What do you suppose it unlocks, Dr. John?" Neil watched his face.

"It might be a door, it might be a gate—it might be a prison! It might open almost anything in one of these old Spanish houses. Those are very old stones, Neil, they bejewel everything, you know. They love ornaments"—he was studying it carefully—"I've never seen a finer piece of workmanship. Ramón—I suppose Ramón adored it, poor boy! A graceless scamp, but I liked him."

"I wonder what he was doing in Ten Yen's compound? I wonder why Ten Yen murdered him? He was the best-looking man I ever saw." The doctor nodded.

"Charm"—briefly—"they all had it; every last one of the Delgardas had charm. It was Ramón's undoing. That and his extravagance. Extravagance delivered him into the hands of Ten Yen. Crewe—what do you think?"

"Probably you're right." Crewe was staring at the key. "I think of all the beautiful and sinister things I've ever seen that key is the most deadly. There's a blight on it—it ruins everything it

touches. I wish Neil wouldn't keep it overnight. I'd rather throw it in the bay than see Elena have it."

Neil slowly laid it back in its inlaid box lined with faded yellow satin.

"It isn't going to be thrown in the bay—and Elena's not going to get it," he said with decision. "I'll find out first, what it unlocks."

"I suppose," said Crewe, watching him keenly, "that we are all agreed that Elena must not have it—no matter what happens."

"Of course," said Dr. John, and Neil nodded as he put the box back in his pocket. "You haven't told us what happened this morning, when Ah Sing came." The doctor pulled up his easy chair and lit his Filipino pipe, while Neil, dropping to the Spanish chest, made a dramatic recital of Ah Sing's visit, and the half-caste Filipino who came in at the back door. It took so long to tell it the doctor's pipe went out, and Crewe sat engrossed, holding the cigarette he had forgotten to light, and throwing in a word now and then.

"By Jupiter!" muttered the doctor, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "By Jupiter—I haven't had such a thrill since the Insurrecto days." Crewe smiled over at him.

"Neil, do you think anybody followed you coming through the streets?" he said.

"I felt sure of it," promptly. Neil got up and walked over to the long window. Things moved down in the patio, but it might be only the night wind, which was rising. The feathery bamboo

scratched against the house, and scudding clouds raced across the moon. He watched the patio a moment, then came slowly back and stood, with his puzzled frowning face staring down at the two men.

"I believe there's a guard about the house," he said abruptly. "I felt eyes all up and down the street, and just before I reached the gate I saw a man running along the top of the church wall opposite."

"Along Santa Maria wall?" The doctor's back straightened, his eyes were very bright, "Crewe, what shall we do?—that isn't safe." Crewe looked back at him thoughtfully. Things *were* getting a bit thick.

"This house hasn't been safe since Ah Sing came this morning for Neil, Dr. John, but there are three of us to guard it." Dr. John stared at him—fidgeted with his papers.

"It's like Insurrecto days—with Spanish snipers—all around you—but you couldn't reach one of them. I miss Angelo," he said suddenly. "Have either of you dined? I'm hungry as a bear! There's cold chicken in the ice box. Angelo left sandwiches and papaya for lunch, but I couldn't eat it. Neil, can you boil water? Crewe, please keep a sharp eye on the stairs and windows." An odd expression crossed the doctor's face. "They say a man fights better on a full stomach." Neil followed Dr. John to the kitchen and Crewe sat very silent—thinking. How strange and tragic that Neil should have

gone up the Pasig and seen the portrait of a murdered man in that old hacienda.

How strange and tragic that he should have faced that portrait with the murdered man's wife beside him, and not dared to say a word.

After a few moments the doctor came back with a tray of food. Neil carried a pot of tea that steamed hospitably. Dr. John pushed his manuscripts away, and they drew their chairs up to the table. Three tired hungry men, for nobody had dined and nobody had lunched. For a time there was silence in the long hot room while they ate and the wind stirred the ferns. They could hear an occasional calesa rattle down the street; from the Pasig came the long shrill whistle of a river boat; church bells were ringing in a distant corner of the Walled City.

"Crewe hasn't told you that he took a launch and looked up the *Che Kiang.*" The Doctor looked over a huge slice of papaya. "But I went down to the Chief of Customs. I was all the afternoon finding him, and then he wasn't interested. The Number Five signal is up, so he was busy about the harbor. He told me the *Che Kiang* had been in here twice before, with no irregularities. She's just a tramp freighter. I was starting for the Governor-General's when you burst in." Neil smiled at the impetuous little man and then looked at Crewe.

"It took two hours to get past Cavite." Crewe leaned back and gravely lighted his cigarette.

"Waves—choppy, rather. But we found her directly outside the harbor in a cove. I saw the name *Che Kiang.* There's something strange about that boat—" He broke off suddenly, his tired eyes staring at the window as if he still peered up through a welter of mist and wave at the name—"*Che Kiang*-Kowloon." "She's not just an ordinary freighter, rides close to the water. Something queer about her."

Neil listened, absorbed. So she *was* close in then. He'd like to see her. She couldn't land without the key—Ramón Delgarda's key! She had intrigued him from the first—the *Che Kiang.* He'd like to know the history of that boat. His abstracted hand reached for a fifth sandwich.

"By the way," added Crewe, passing his cigarettes, "you left an unfinished letter on the table. It was addressed to the Ransome Art Gallery. My sister Victory took it—if anything had happened, you see."

"Oh, did I? Thanks, Crewe. And that reminds me—just as I was leaving the hacienda the señora got a letter from Mayhew. He's going out there tonight—I heard her tell Paula. And she looked upset. I wonder what he wants?"

Crewe's fork dropped with a crash that made the doctor jump.

"But she's all alone out there—that won't do, you know." He was on his feet and reaching for his hat. "Somebody ought to be there. It isn't safe!" Neil was astounded at the feeling in his face. "Well, by George—!" he told himself.

"There's Paula?" slowly.

"Paula!" Crewe shrugged *her* away. "Another woman!"

"Well," said the doctor, staring, "what in thunder are *you* going to do, Crewe?"

"Y' see"—Crewe's voice was quick, nervous—"y' see, he was insultin' to her at the Manila Hotel this morning. He's a filthy rotter! She's afraid of him! And now that Delgarda's dead—why, of course—" He started for the stairs. "I'll get a motor car and see if she won't come back to the casa and stay with Victory."

The crinkles around Dr. John's eyes deepened. A singular expression crossed his face.

"I don't believe I would if I were you. But anyway, she won't come."

"Why wouldn't you?" said Crewe sharply.

"Well"—Dr. John was tremendously entertained—"you see, Elena was there this morning to get her jewel box. Victory didn't like her!"

"Nonsense!" Crewe dismissed whatever feeling Victory might have, with a gesture. "As soon as I take Elena to the casa I'll be back." He hurried down the stairway while Neil and the doctor looked after him. Then their eyes met. Dr. John leaned farther back in his big chair.

"Well, that means she's got him," he muttered. "Yes—he's done for. I felt it all along, poor Victory." Dr. John was troubled, puzzled. "I knew trouble came up the stairs with Elena last night," he sputtered.

Neil frowned; he felt restless, unhappy. After

taking several turns around the room, he stopped to stare down at the moonlit patio. Of all the surprising turns! Crewe, the quiet, the imperturbable, the self-contained, to go off his head like a schoolboy over his first love affair. Neil could hardly grasp it! And there was another thought that made the expression of chagrin deepen on his face. He was seeing Elena in her white dress, with her scarlet fan and that enchanting movement of her head, greeting Crewe on the lonely balcony. There would be the sparkle of the moonbeams on the water, over Elena's lovely face. He knew how beautiful she would look in that glamorous light, and he recalled the glow in Crewe's eyes as he went down the stairway. With a quick squaring of his shoulders and a deep breath, Neil turned back into the room—

Well—that was that!

## CHAPTER XIX

BUT Dr. John's face was very serious as he stood beside the big table listening to a gust of rain on the old tiled roof. Events were crowding almost too thick and fast in his quiet life. His head was bent, his eyes withdrawn; his sense of humor was completely dashed. Neil glanced at him once, then lighted a cigarette and sat watching the smoke curl up to the dim ceiling. Events were getting beyond him too.

At last the doctor sighed, relaxed, and dropped into his comfortable chair. He picked up his pipe, filled it, and began to smoke absently.

"Dr. John, what did the señora mean when she said you'd missed too many boats?" asked Neil suddenly.

"That's a phrase used all over the Orient," said the doctor, smiling. "After a man's been out here a year he says that he's going home next year, you know. Then next year he says that he's going home in three years; but in three years he thinks he won't go home for five years—and then it's too late. By that time, he's missed too many boats—he never goes home. He's held by the tropics."

"But don't you want to go home?" Neil was interested in a phase of life new to him.

"Good Lord, why should I? I have Angelo, at

least I did have him. An easy comfortable life—this nice old casa to live in. We're here on the main traveled ocean lanes and I meet people it would be impossible for me to know in the States—what the devil would I do in Red Oak, Iowa?"

Neil smoked and thought about it, while the doctor told him fascinating tales of other white men in the Islands who had missed too many boats. They talked for a long time, almost an hour.

"They may tell you it's not a white man's country," said the doctor at the end of his summing up, "but I've yet to meet the white man who didn't love it—who didn't remember it—and want to come back again. Don't you believe them."

Suddenly they heard the whirr of a motor—the bang of its door, the rattling of the iron gates down below.

"Crewe! I'll let him in." Dr. John raced down the steps, and Neil glanced at his watch. Ten o'clock! *Could* he have brought Elena back so soon?

Behind the excited doctor came Crewe, white, tired and with him a bedraggled black-haired creature, with owl eyes and trembling hands. By all that was holy, Paula!

"Where's Elena?" demanded Neil.

There was an amazing difference in Crewe. An hour ago he had been frantic, on fire to reach the hacienda, but now as he came slowly up the steps he was rigid—like a man stiffening under a blow.

"Elena's gone!" he said, coming into the room.

"Mayhew got there first. I brought Paula, but I haven't been able to get much out of her."

"Mayhew?" Neil was shocked. "Do you mean she *went* with Mayhew? Why, she hated him!"

"I found Paula by the gates. She'd been there hours—waiting for Elena. All I could get out of her was that her mistress had gone with him, in an automobile. Paula never saw *me* before—she was afraid. She only came because I was bringing her to the doctor." Dr. John had hurried from his cabinet with a glass of colored water.

"Here, Paula, take this. Tubig!" Paula looked at him imploringly, and gulped it down. Then she stood trembling, her black eyes roving from one to the other of the three men.

"For God's sake," said Crewe, "see if you can't get something out of her! Make her talk!"

"Come here, Paula!" Dr. John beckoned. "Here, take off that rag, so I can see your face. Now—what happened?" She gazed up at him terrified, as he unwound the black scarf from her head.

"Ay de mi, señor! Ay de mi! Oh, Dios—Dios!"

"Stop it, Paula! Never mind the saints! Now—did your señora go away with Mayhew?"

"Si, señor—oh, si! She go with el señor Mayhew! He iss a devil!" Paula's teeth clicked. "I say —'No, no, señora—you must not go—he lie!' but she go. Ay de mi—she go!"

The doctor was puzzled.

"H-mm—that's strange! But, Paula—did she want to go?"

"Oh, si, señor Doctor." Paula nodded her head. "She will not listen to Paula—no!"

"My God—what made her do that?" groaned Crewe. "What did he tell her?"

"Paula, what did he say?" The doctor stood over her, his legs apart, his shrewd eyes trying to probe that baffling, childish, native mind.

"He say—'El Señor Ramón, he iss dead!' Ah—Gracias á Dios!" Paula's face changed, an odd expression of satisfaction was in her eyes. "La señora —*she* pray by the picture, si."

"So the damned cur told her!" said Neil.

"Wait! Now, Paula, was this Señor Mayhew nice to the señora?"

"Si, señor—nice—like a cat!" They saw a black flash in her eyes. "She dress all in fine clothes, so, and so—" Paula's little brown hands fluttered. "But I, Paula, I take this—" A swift gesture showed the knife, and the doctor started.

"I suppose you'd have used it too," grimly. "Did the señora give it to you?"

"Si, señor. She iss much afraid! Ay de mi! She will never come back—no!" wept Paula, wringing her hands.

"No more of that now!" Dr. John's sharp tone caught her up. "Listen, Paula—why did she go?"

"It iss something of el Señor Ramón's."

*"The Key!"* Neil got it instantly.

*"The Key!"* Crewe's tone was horror-stricken.

*"That infernal Key!"* muttered the doctor. "That's what brought her from the hacienda. The key!" He turned back to Paula. "Where did she

go? Stop that noise, Paula, you little fool! Where did she go? Did she tell you?"

"Si, señor. Here—Intramuros. One hour—absolutamente! She say, one hour!" Suddenly Paula burst into wild weeping. Dropping to the floor, she rocked back and forth. She had kept vigil there by the gates, watching the coming storm, listening until her ears ached for the sound of big wheels, cold with terror—and her señora had not come. Only evil could follow this unholy errand of her señora's.

"Dr. John," said Crewe, "will you make Paula come with me? I'm going to take her and find Elena—if I have to search every inch of the Walled City."

Again Crewe had changed. Life and fire had come back into his eyes. He was a dynamo of nervous energy chafing to be out, hunting for Elena.

Dr. John bent over the little Filipina. He spoke rapidly in Spanish and the old woman looked across at Crewe, with her black eyes gleaming. Tears rolled down her face. But after a few words —punctuated by Paula's questions—she nodded, wiped the tears away, and came quietly to Crewe's side.

"Bueno! I go with you!"

Cecil Crewe, tall, fair, stood by the table and looked soberly from face to face.

"You see how it is, don't you?" He was appealing to them. "I don't like to desert you two, but she's first. I'll have to go! I'll spend the night hunting her!"

"It's all you can do," said Neil grimly.

And the doctor nodded. They watched Crewe, with Paula shuffling at his side, go down the stairs —they were very sober, these two.

And once more in that hot room where the lizards ran up and down the high walls, and the ferns drooped in the lifeless air, where wind and storm were beginning to play a devil's fandango over roofs and trees, they faced each other. For the second time that night Crewe had left them alone.

"The key—and now its reached out to Elena!" said the doctor slowly.

"It's a beautiful old key!" insisted Neil.

"I don't know. I believe Crewe is right. It's a damnable key! I don't believe in magic and yet—I've lived too long among native tribes to disbelieve it, entirely. Just think a minute. That key cost Ramón his life. God knows what it will do to Elena, or to you. You're not through with it yet, not by a long shot. Look at us now—" The doctor's glance swept the disordered room. "That key has a vitality that's malignant. I don't like it. I wish you'd get rid of it! I hope Elena has never seen it!"

"I wonder if she has?"

Dr. John shook his head. He was thinking about Elena—dramatic, tempestuous Elena. He had never liked her. But of course, that was because of his long life in the Islands. He had seen too much of Spain tinged with Malay to care for Spain even of the purest Castilian blood. No, he had

never liked Elena, but now he felt sorry for her.

And he was thinking of Crewe; that quiet self-contained Englishman turned suddenly into an absorbed and passionate lover. He was thinking of Victory, who adored him. What a situation! Dr. John shook his head over it! Crewe in love with a Spanish girl! Could any good come out of that? Could there be a future for them? He doubted it. Perhaps, if they stayed in the Far East—but certainly not if Crewe took her back to England. Crewe—storming out into the wind and the night with Paula, while Victory waited for him in old Delgarda Casa. Extraordinary! When there was only one Victory in the world too, and Crewe knew it. The only woman the doctor had ever met who had the brains, and the sense of humor, to appreciate Far Eastern politics. How would she take it? Would she ever care for Elena? The doctor shook his head again and glanced at Neil. *He* had never met Victory. Those two good-looking young people should console each other,—for Neil had liked Elena too—chagrin, disappointment, had been in his eyes. The doctor saw it, but Crewe hadn't. Crewe could see nothing. Never in his life had the doctor witnessed a man fall in love in such sudden, vehement, headlong fashion as Crewe had. As if a tropic fever had struck him—by Jupiter!

"Of course, Crewe would forget to lock the gates," he told Neil. "I'll go down and look at them."

It was through the bewildering mist of his own thoughts that Neil watched the tumbled white

figure hurry down the stairs! in a moment he heard him coming slowly back, walking very softly on his toes. At the head of the stairs he beckoned to Neil mysteriously.

"S-s-shhh!" he whispered. "Come here!"

## CHAPTER XX

THERE was something ominous about the little figure standing on the stairs, beckoning. Neil threw a nervous glance about the old room, then rose and walked over to him.

"What's the matter?" he whispered. Dr. John came up another step, motioning through the railings.

"S-S-shh! Be quiet! Take off your shoes!" pointing. In the dim light of the landing Neil saw the gleam of the doctor's white-stockinged feet. He sat down and pulled off his shoes, with tingles of excitement running through him. An exhilarating sense of danger connected with that unholy angling stairway, and intensified by the listening attitude of the figure waiting in semi-darkness. Setting his shoes down, Neil slipped along the wall, and met the doctor just above the landing.

"Come down into the patio." The doctor gripped his arm. They shuffled, without noise, keeping close to the solid masonry until they reached the landing, its dim light receding as they went down. Up in the sala the air had been hot and loaded with tobacco fumes. Here underneath the house it was cooler, the wind was sucked in from the streets in whirling little gusts.

As they stepped down on the flagstones—Neil

glanced quickly along the passage to the great iron gates in front. Would Chinamen, or the shadows of Chinamen, be out in the street? But the gates were tightly closed, etched like black lace against Santa Maria's high white walls. Beyond them lay the quiet street flooded with moonlight—moonlight thin and strained as if it were being slowly quenched by storm clouds scudding in from the open ocean. He could see bits of paper and refuse being whirled by the wind along the cobbles, and above the walls of the church he caught a glimpse of rocking trees. It was eerie—it was more than that, it was a night that matched the ancient grim house built in a period of rape and conquest. For a moment they stood hidden in the gloom of the passage, while the doctor's nervous face, a pale blur, peered through the iron gates at the scene, framed like a weird night picture by the elliptical arch. But there was not even the shadow of a man in the gate, or on the street, and turning, they stepped softly along the passage, and headed for the patio.

Their stockinged feet made no sound on the old flags. They moved under heavy walls, beside damp masonry, until they stood directly under the last big span of the passage, and could see into the patio. Not a large place, not more than thirty feet square, but a great many things were moving in it. Probably only trees and shrubs in the night wind. As the doctor hesitated and listened, Neil looked around, sniffing the earth smells, clean, fresh, mixed with the heavy sweetness, like tube-

rose, of Dama de Noche. The doctor began to skirt the right wall of the house, keeping close to its shadows, with Neil at his heels, wondering what the devil he had seen that made him so jumpy. In the center of the patio, one tall coco palm dangled its ragged skirts, and against the left wall of the house, where discolored plaster made dark blots in the moonlight, stood a heavy growth of tall bamboo. They went around a tangle of cadena and shrubbery. By the heavy spiked patio door, Neil saw a plaster saint standing in her niche, and holding a little fluted shell for holy water. The mounting wind in the treetops held a rustling whine, unlike any sound he had heard before, and suddenly the doctor stopped short, looked at the sky, then laid his lips against Neil's ear—

"Typhoon!" he whispered.

"Typhoon!" That curse of the Islands! How could one believe it with the moon sailing so serenely? And yet there was something in the air, a heavy oppression, like the moment before a thunderstorm, only intensified by tropic heat and dampness.

The gate to the patio was closed. The doctor motioned toward it, looked around and nodded. Slowly, inch by inch, he began to pull it open, just far enough for them to see out into the narrow lane lying back of these houses. The long shadow of a man fell across the lane, and touched the door. They stared at it. Then the doctor looked back again and nodded. This was what he had seen! Some one guarded that hot narrow lane! Some one

had been detailed to watch the patio gate. Neil leaned closer, he stretched his neck past Dr. John's shoulder. In this stifling unnatural night, one of Ten Yen's men waited for the key! Implacable, immovable, sure—that was it! The same quiet certainty which had been in Ten Yen's voice when he said "I get him!" was in the poise of that black shadow. Neil began to waver. At no time since he had come into the old Walled City, not to-night when he went hurrying through the streets, not even when he had been struck in the gate by the Chinaman had he felt such certainty that Ten Yen was slowly surrounding him with a ring of men, like a ring of steel. Until this moment, youth and luck and his plucky spirit had assured him that somehow they would see him through. But now—he began to wonder! He moved a little; it was just enough to loose a rattling stone by the gate. Instantly the shadow shifted! Like a flash Dr. John closed the gate and pulled Neil down behind the shrubbery.

Crouching, hardly breathing, they waited, wondering what the shadow would do next? They listened; but bare feet make no noise in dusty lanes. They watched, mesmerized, their eyes hanging on the gate, which had begun to open very slowly. A crack, a wider crack, then a head appeared, suspended, listening. A round black Chinese head, the features of the face silhouetted against the wood. Afraid to breathe they gazed, alert, vigilant! But Neil began to feel the angry blood sing behind his ears; what fools to come into this cul de sac!

The doctor's hand on his arm held him like a vise. Then a gust of wind from the street skirled down the passage, trees groaned and creaked, the palm rustled its dry skirts, the bamboos tapped the house. And the Chinese face, eager, guarded, watched a moment longer, then carefully withdrew and the gate closed behind it. The Chinaman had returned to the immobility of a shadow in the lane.

For half a minute neither of them moved, then Dr. John's grip relaxed. Silently they crept around the wall to the passage moving slowly, one step at a time, they melted into its dim shelter and then their stockinged feet hurried them up the stairway, and into the friendly sala. At the top of the stairs they stood—and looked at each other.

"Well—that"—said Dr. John, curtly—"was close!"

Neil dusted his clothes and walked over to the Spanish table.

"What's to prevent their coming in, at any time, Dr. John?" Dr. John set the glass of water down he was drinking; he was angry, his chin stuck out, his frosty blue eyes swept the room.

"That bolo there, is one thing," he snapped. "Neil, get it down!"

Neil stood on tiptoe and pulled the great Moro knife from the wall. A formidable weapon, very long, sharp, and looking as if it had often been used. He put it on the table and glanced around the room. Something had happened to it! Last night he had thought it friendly, white-walled, with an odd tropical hominess new to him. But since

his brief visit to the patio, Ten Yen's influence had reached out to every dusky corner. The long shell windows were too open to the night, the walled stairs were only fit for ambush, the shadows were tenanted by ghosts.

"How did you know he was out there?" turning suddenly to the doctor.

"When I went down with Crewe I thought there was something queer about the lock, the key didn't fit, it looked as if it had been tampered with. So I slipped off my shoes and went to the patio gate. When I found it open I looked out." Neil nodded slowly.

"Yes, they're on guard all right. I've thought of another thing, Dr. John. They let me come in on purpose. They wanted me to come in, d'ye see? Of course they didn't stop me in the streets, they merely watched me. No wonder I felt eyes up and down. It's a trap; and I walked straight into it, like a fool."

"Eh? Yes, I believe you're right." Suddenly—"Of course you're right. But then, where else could you go? We'll get ready for them." The doctor was not only alarmed, he was deeply insulted that natives should tamper with this old house, in a sense his castle. Going from door to door that opened on lofty empty rooms, he locked them.

"D'ye think they've planned to watch the house, then when we're asleep, rush it, eh?" anxiously. "These doors are tight enough. But they'll come in through the window or up the stairs." His eyes wandered from one to the other. "We can close

the windows—it'll be hot as hell. Of course we can barricade the stairs, but—"

"Leave the light on," suggested Neil.

Going over to the window he pushed aside the ferns and stood looking at the patio. It was a dark swaying mass but he thought he saw the glimmer of the little shrine. And behind it—behind the tranquil saint—was that black shadow still standing in the lane? And the people hidden along the streets, on top of Santa Maria's high walls, or wherever a projecting arch or a dim passage sheltered them—what were *they* doing? Unseen, but active, furtive yet shifting like the wind! It was a good night for Ten Yen's men to work. The storm was coming in; black clouds almost obscured the moon; he heard the patter of rain on the tiled roof. That wouldn't be so good, would it? For ships out beyond Cavite?—he thought grimly. This wind would kick up the devil of a row on these waters. He hoped she couldn't stand the strain; he hoped she'd be driven in—the *Che Kiang*—Kowloon!

When he looked back over his shoulder there was the doctor fingering a key and staring at his Spanish chest. What rotten luck for him, by George! To lose Angelo, the studious quiet of his old house, and to be drawn into a dangerous intrigue that nobody could see the end of.

"I'm infernally sorry, Dr. John—bringing all this trouble into your house."

"Ho—don't let that disturb you! But they must have been sure you'd come back here, or that China-

man wouldn't be watching. Why *were* they so sure?"

"Deduction!" said Neil shortly. "Ten Yen thinks! He knew I was hurt in the gate, and came to you for help. Angelo told him. I had to sleep somewhere, I had to get my arm dressed. No decent white man goes to the Mindora if he can help it, I can see that now.—Como no?" Neil shrugged. Dr. John smiled a little, and nodded.

"No Chinaman works in the open either," he complained, his eyes on Neil who was bringing a small automatic from his bedroom. "That's good." He laid a wicked-looking machete on the table alongside the bolo knife. Then he proceeded to sweep his precious manuscript into a basket regardless of notes or numbered pages. Nothing the doctor could have done would have shown the disruption of his routine so clearly. Unlocking his Spanish chest, he pulled out an arsenal of antiquated weapons. There were long Spanish guns with rusty locks, knives, American muskets used in the Spanish war, an old six-shooter or two. If the situation had been less grave, Neil might have seen the humor of the peppery little man bending over his chest and unloading his armory. "Look at this!"

"Here, let me see some of those!" Neil picked up one of the Spanish guns, and found it quite useless; the magazine hermetically sealed with rust.

"Santa Maria! The rains—the rains! Do you suppose they are all like that?" Sweat streamed down the doctor's face, his nervous fingers exam-

ined first one and then another; at last he dropped them all suddenly, with a crash, on the floor, and sat down on the chest.

"Hell! What'll we do now?" His despairing blue eyes looked up at Neil.

But one six-shooter had escaped the dampness; by working it slowly, Nell found it slipped.

"Here's one—wait—I've found another! Where's the oil?" Dr. John brought it and they began to polish vigorously.

"There's no use appealing to the police." The doctor was breathing on the metal and rubbing hard. "They'd only put you in the cuartel, and confiscate the key. Then afterwards, they might present it to Elena. Americans don't get much protection in the Islands. These natives act first and think afterwards. If it's a question of a Spaniard or an American,—the American is *always* wrong, always. They don't like us," he complained, squinting along the muzzle of the gun.

They were sitting side by side, both polishing with vigor, and as the guns began to shine, the odor of grease filled the hot room. "They don't like our manners, or our—" The doctor forgot what he was saying. He stared at Neil, electrified by the expression in his eyes that were fixed on the black open stairway.

"What's the matter—nerves?" The doctor quietly put his gun down.

"I'd swear," whispered Neil, "that I saw a black head come up those stairs! There were eyes, just above the top step!" Dr. John leaped to his feet,

and Neil followed him. They looked down into the shadowy stairway, but it was quite empty. Not a sound! Nothing but the wind sweeping through the tunnel-like passage with a mournful soughing.

## CHAPTER XXI

FOR a moment Neil stood still at the top of the stairs.

"But that's very strange! Was I wrong —or—"

"No," the doctor interrupted him, "no. Some native *may* have crept up as far as the landing, then crawled on his stomach until he could look into the room." He was frowning, disturbed. "Well," he added, after a little silence, "I hope he saw guns. Let's close the windows."

It took all their strength to fasten the shell casements, swollen by wind and rain. The doctor tugged and swore softly in Tagalog.

"Now, we'll barricade the stairs."

Together they pushed the heavy Spanish table across the sala, until it filled the wide opening of the stairway. Dr. John looked at it with satisfaction.

"They can't surprise us."

"This may be an all night's vigil," Neil reminded him. "It's ten-thirty. One of us should get an hour's sleep. We can take it turn about. If you want to lie down, I'll sit here and smoke." His face was drawn and tired, he looked feverish. He was coatless, collarless, his white shirt turned in at the neck. His brown eyes were dull, and Dr. John

touched the arm he had bandaged before supper.

"I don't need rest, but you do. Go and get it! We'll move the chest so I can face the stairway. I'll take my pipe and sit there. If I hear a sound or see anything, I'll sing out!" His steady eyes looked up at Neil.

"Give me an hour." Neil laid his hand on the doctor's shoulder.

"All right. Leave your door open a crack."

Reaction after the long sustained excitement of the day, together with the unbearable heat, was making Neil sleepy. His arm ached, sweat streamed down his face. He watched Dr. John light his villainous Filipino pipe, then he walked slowly to his bedroom, at the far end. Before he went in he looked back at the long white-hot sala. They had pulled the Spanish chest out until it faced the stairs. The doctor sat there, in the midst of his weapons—the bolo knife, the machete, the two old muskets, a head-hunter's axe, even an Australian boomerang. A little cloud of smoke was rising above his head, he looked wide awake and very much alive, and Neil smiled a little. When he went into his room he gave only a casual look around, for earlier in the evening he had examined it thoroughly, and closed the shell windows opening on the street. He pushed back the white net that hung from a ring in the ceiling over the Spanish bed. Too hot for nets!

Two high carved chairs stood beside the tall paneled doors which must have been fashioned for the Spaniard's pride rather than his height. There

was a huge polished chest in one corner—Angelo called it an "aparador." And on a flat wooden stand inlaid with ivory stood a very ordinary bowl and pitcher. The room was large and gloomy. It had a Spartan simplicity, although there was nothing comfortable or inviting about it. The high walls, where opalescent lizards darted up and down, ended in open gratings, as they had done in the Mindora. By George, there was something weird, insecure, about those gratings! Sitting on the bed, Neil looked up at them. Dr. John was right, nobody could tell what would happen. By picking up an old key in a dark lane, he had set in motion a chain of circumstances, that worked as inevitably as Fate. It had led him to the Walled City—to the Mindora—to this house—this room. He pulled the box out of his pocket and sat looking at the lights sparkling on the yellow gold and diamonds of the key. It was cold and smooth in his hands—a little worn at the shank. He was lost in whirling thoughts. The key carried everyone connected with it into danger. There was Ramón —and now Elena.

Turning it over in his fingers, he could see the misty Kowloon lane, the Moon Gate; he could hear the terrified voice crying "Ayudame!" in the night. "Ayudame!" That word had rung in his ears all the way across the Yellow Sea, and nobody had told him what it meant.

He thought about Elena. The key had drawn Elena down from the safety of her forlorn old hacienda. But how under heaven was Crewe going to

find her, in this maze of ancient streets and houses? And there was old Paula, trembling, frightened, hurrying out into the storm, a devoted terrier following a beloved scent.

Sighing, he put the key away in the pocket of his knickerbockers. Then he gave another look around, snapped out the light and dropped down on the big hard bed. He lay listening to the storm, watching the thin line of light that shone from the sala through the crack in the door. It seemed a long way off, for the bed was at the extreme end of the enormous room and close to the shell windows. Vaguely he could hear the sharp hoofs of small Manila ponies on the cobbles. Above the wind came the shrill, far-away whistle of a river boat. Rain beat on the tiles far above his head with millions of tapping fingers. It was the last thing he remembered before he went to sleep.

He had been dreaming endlessly. But he was still in that borderland where the subconscious could warn him that something was wrong. He was uneasy, restless. He forced himself awake, and sat up in bed. The rain fell, wind rattled the casements, the sala was quiet, undisturbed, he could see the line of light in his door, and could smell the doctor's strong old pipe. It was peaceful and secure.

"Everything all right?" he called out.

"All shipshape! Go to sleep!" commanded the doctor.

His voice sounded far away. He was probably doubled up on the old chest smoking. Neil dropped

back on his pillows. He was a little dazed from his first heavy sleep, and very tired. The wind blew a loose tile from the roof, he heard it rattle on the cobbles as he began to doze off again. The next thing he knew he was sitting up in bed, staring wild eyed at the blackness. Something moved! He hadn't heard it! He hadn't seen it! By straining his eyes he could see the pale mist of the bed net, the shimmer of the closed windows. Why did he have a sharp sense of danger? He reached for his automatic, but he'd left it in the sala! He'd open the door, get some light in here—swinging his feet cautiously around until they touched the floor, he stood up.

As he straightened, the thing seized him from behind. He had one awful, sickening instant of terror! Out of the blackness something leaped upon his back. It wound itself around his neck, his chest and upper thighs. His fingers touched a body that was slippery, cold and clammy, like a big snake. Gruesome tales that he had read or heard flashed through his mind. He writhed and twisted, bent and turned. Sweat ran down his legs, cold chills ran up his back! There was a sweet rancid smell about the creature. It slithered from his body, and coiled about his feet, but before it could rise in front of him he stooped and with all his strength tried to push it away. Suddenly his fingers grabbed hair that was bristling, thick, oily!

*The creature was human! A naked man greased!*

In that stifling heat it was as if he fought a wet and clammy serpent. His hands caught a thigh,

that wriggled away from him, shoulders that slipped, and slipped! Around and around this huge and breathless room they struggled, the pressure of those exploring arms tightening every instant! The smell, the terror, the heat—were sapping Neil's strength! He felt a wrench at his clothes, then a tearing sound as his pocket was ripped. The damned wretch was trying to steal his key! Neil shouted! Tearing savagely at the oily body, he caught the naked wrist and felt the sharp edge of the box. Then the wrist squirmed out of his hand as if it had been the tail of an eel. Neil's fingers dripped with grease! No wonder he couldn't hold him! He shouted again; heard the doctor jump to his feet and the clatter of guns as they fell from the chest. The door was flung open and against the light he saw the flying naked figure, black and shining, streak into the sala. It plunged headlong into the doctor, who was racing down the room over the polished floor to Neil's door.

"Catch him!" shouted Neil, tearing down the sala, "he's greased! He's got the key!" But taken by surprise, the doctor went down with an angry yell, rolling over and over.

"It's the Malay trick!" he shouted.

The black and flying figure cleared the barricade and plunged down the stairs. And Neil, whirling the great table aside leaped after him, with the doctor's words singing in his ears—

"The Malay trick!"

So—Ten Yen had sent a greased native to steal his key! The KEY—it was all he thought about! He

was hysterical, cursing as he ran! He saw the black body shine for a moment in the dim light of the passage as it skimmed toward the patio. Neil was so close now that he could hear the panting breaths! Down the covered way they went and into the rain-swept garden. And there—he lost him! The rain, the night, the shadows, swallowed him up! Neil stared about desperately. He hesitated! He heard the doctor stumbling pell-mell down the stairway shouting—

"Neil! Neil! Where are you? Where are you?"

Neil saw the patio gate swing open—heard it creak. He'd follow that greased native! He'd get the key back if he had to chase him to Manila. He plunged through the wet shrubbery toward the gate. Vines caught his feet, rain dashed in his face, he stumbled, picked himself up, raced on.

Men leaped on him from behind, in front, at his side. The patio was alive, it leaked Chinaman! He called frantically—

"Dr. John! Dr. John!" but something stifling, evil smelling was wrapped about his head. Stunned, dizzy, he struggled with it, then rocking earth, and reeling sky, had dropped into impenetrable blackness! He went down—down—down—

Ten Yen had won!

## CHAPTER XXII

CECIL CREWE with little frightened Paula at his side, hurried down the dark stairs, and through the long passage to the street. Never in his life had any feeling of fear or danger, either to Victory or himself, approached the poignant emotion he felt now, for Elena. He had seen men, many men, go down under the spell of a woman's charm, but that love would have this devastating effect on himself was incredible. With every instinct urging him to action he could barely restrain himself from rushing out into the night. But this was no time to fumble; he needed Paula's native instinct—yes; but he must also use his own acumen and judgment. He glanced hastily around the quiet moonlit street. Here, where shadows were long and black, he was very conscious of evil—more conscious because the evil was unseen—undefined. Yet it was carried on the wind—it lurked in the barred windows—it hovered over the high white walls of Santa Maria—it drifted around dark doorways. The night did not shout evil—but it whispered; and he was suspicious of whispers. He kept his hand on Paula's thin shoulder until they had crossed the street and had walked the full length of Santa Maria's walls. Once or twice, remembering the man Neil had seen

running doubled up like a jackknife, he glanced up searchingly, but there was no one on the wall. After they turned the corner he looked down at Paula.

"Where are you going, Paula?"

"Señor, I have amigos—I go to them. They help me. And everybody in Intramuros—they know the Señora Delgarda. Si they run-run—into this casa —into that. Everyone knows soon—she iss gone!"

"I understand, one tells the other. Quite so! Do you need money—pesos, Paula?"

"No, señor. But if I do not find, then I must have pesos—si?" Paula looked up searchingly in his face.

Crewe nodded. "And how much time, Paula?"

"One hour—solamente. Then I come back—si—for pesos."

Crewe looked around his shoulder, then down the street, but nobody was in sight.

"Come to Casa Delgarda—do you know where that is, Paula?"

"Oh, si-si." She looked surprised. "But it iss my casa, señor."

"I had forgotten—one hour then? I'll wait for you."

Her thin little witch face nodded, and he stared at her a moment. Deep lines ran from Paula's nostrils to her mouth. He had been told that the Tagalog's sense of smell is singularly acute. Perhaps Paula would sniff the exotic perfume Elena used, until it hung about her like a curtain. He knew that if Paula got even a slight clue she would

track it like a hunter in the forest. He watched her flit away, snatched by the windy night. Surely she would bring something back with her, some gleam to penetrate this fog which hid Elena!

He went home by way of Ah Sing's bookshop—that unholy place below the pavement, where Ah Sing collected rare old MSS. from China and Tibet, and also set in motion intrigues which reached to the farthest confines of the Walled City. How they had been tricked by that Chinaman! Dr. John, who knew the old city in and out—and Crewe presumably a judge of men. At least the Home Office paid him to be a judge of men! Both of them fooled by the plausible Oriental. He looked about searchingly when he reached Ah Sing's. But it was dark, tightly closed; the heavy wooden door bolted, the typhoon shutters nailed in front of the window hiding the firecrackers and the ginger jars. The black ideographs on the white wall looked like black and white studies in eerie decoration. Crewe paused, wondering if there was some secret business going on behind those shutters? Then he turned away and walked swiftly toward Delgarda Casa.

He passed a few loitering pedestrians—all natives; he saw a motor car, flinging sheets of water from its tires, dash through the narrow street; he saw a carretela filled with market stuff ambling along toward the Pasig—but he saw all of this as if it were a dream, it was only a background for Elena. Elena with her little accent—the charming curve of her head—the witchery of her smile!

At the iron gateway to Delgarda Casa he paused —struck by another thought. Victory! He had hardly remembered her all day. He hadn't been home for luncheon, or dinner; he had even forgotten to send a chit, and of course she had waited. It was rotten of him! He had a distinct feeling of chagrin. How was he going to make Victory understand that he had been so obsessed by another woman he had completely forgotten her? What the deuce would she be thinking of all this?

At the top of the steps he looked down the wide balcony with its black and white Bilibid furniture. Victory was usually here, stretched in one of the long wicker chairs reading a month-old *Times*. The lamps were lighted, fresh flowers were in the Moro baskets, the ferns hanging over the balcony railing were damp and sweet smelling, there was a bowl of fruit on the tea table. It looked comfortable and inviting this great outdoor room. Like most white people in the tropics, Crewe and Victory spent many of their waking hours on their balcony. But to-night she was not here. He looked into the sala. The shell lamp was a blot of soft light in the center of the room, but the corners were heavy with shadows. She was not in the sala either! Then he heard voices in her bedroom and Pilar came running out—

"Buenas tardes, señor, I tell señorita—" She disappeared again, as she always did when she saw Crewe.

He went back to the balcony and presently he heard her bedroom door open, and Victory walked

through the sala toward him. He watched her uneasily. She was dressed in a pale pink negligee that fell away from her round arms and made her look so stately that she was quite unlike the Victory of every day.

"Hillo," she said as he shook the rain from his coat—that cool, impersonal voice of Victory's!

"Hello. I'll just get a dry coat and be back directly!"

He went, feeling a little like a schoolboy. When he returned she was waiting for him, standing beside her tea table. She looked as if she had no present intention of sitting down. Glancing at her, he felt sure she preferred to stand. She was aloof; with a remote quality about her, that he had seen before, but not often. It meant that she was very angry.

"Couldn't make it for dinner, Victory. I was too far away to send a chit—sorry—" explained Crewe lamely. This wasn't going to be easy. Victory intended to make it as difficult as she could. She was standing on her dignity.

"Well, it's nearly eleven now." Her voice was smooth, calm.

"Oh—is it?" He looked at his watch. "Yes, by Jove, you're right!"

Victory said nothing—it would have been easier if she had flown out at him, but that was not her way. He flinched a little, wondering how to begin. There was so much to tell her, and it would require all his finesse to do it. Hang it all, why use finesse? Wasn't there just one way to handle this situa-

tion? Shouldn't he make a clean breast of it—throw himself on her sense of justice? One could always be certain of her sense of justice, a rare quality in a woman. He decided it was the best thing to do.

"Victory, have you heard that Neil came back?"

"No, I don't know a thing—nobody tells me anything—" indignantly. "I've been alone here all day—when did he come back?"

"You know, before we got there this morning, Ah Sing with another Chinaman came to the doctor's house. He attacked Neil, and Neil kicked him downstairs—but he couldn't fight two of them, you see. That's why he left his cap behind. He was in a hurry, rawther—"

"Oh—and where did he go?"

"You see, he'd met the Señora Delgarda, so he went up the Pasig to her hacienda. He saw a portrait there in her sala—recognized it instantly. I say, Victory—this is an extraordinary thing! Delgarda was the man murdered in Ten Yen's compound!"

"Not really! Do you mean the Delgarda who owned this casa?" Victory was shocked; so shocked that for a moment she forgot her anger and her hurt pride.

"Elena Delgarda's husband," said Crewe, with great deliberation.

"How frightful!" Victory caught her breath. For the first time since he came up on the balcony she really looked at him.

"Yes; Neil came down the river under cover of the dusk—and later, Mayhew went up to the hacienda and told Elena that her husband was dead. Then he induced her to come to Manila—we think he used the key as a bait. Now *she* has disappeared."

Victory dropped into one of the big chairs, her eyes on his.

"Cecil, how did you find that out?"

"He went up to Elena's hacienda—" He saw her stiffen. "I found old Paula crying in the dark by the gate, she'd been waiting hours for her mistress."

"Did you leave her there?" quickly.

"No, I brought her with me. She's out looking for her señora."

"Is Mr. Winton—at Dr. John's now?"

"Yes; they're waiting—expecting trouble. They may get it, too." He told her about Ah Sing's shop with its closed shutters. She listened, fascinated—her eyes beginning to shine.

"But, of course, I couldn't stay to help them. Neil is a man, he can take care of himself—but I must find Elena." He said it deliberately, looking straight at her.

Victory flinched, watching him with a strange expression.

"Do you call her Elena?—How long have you known her, Cecil?"

For a moment he was silent. How long had he known Elena? It seemed to him, always. His glance swept the great balcony with its bright wicker fur-

niture—its shaded lamps, swinging ferns, and air plants; dropped for a moment to the dark patio, then came back to Victory.

"I think I've always known Elena," said Crewe slowly.

Victory's chin went up, her cheeks were flushed.

"But, Cecil, I'm so amazed at you!"

Crewe looked at her very seriously.

"But, Victory—I want to tell you about her. She came up into the doctor's old room last night, you know, out of the black old stairway, and as she stood there a minute looking at us all she was so lovely—I couldn't believe she was real." He stopped, took one or two strides across the balcony and came back in front of her. "I can't explain—nobody could explain, but she was ethereal—like a vision!"

He was staring at the night, his eyes warm, glowing, every line in his face softened, in an expression Victory had never seen before. And suddenly the tears began to roll down her cheeks. It was the bitterest moment of her life, and Crewe knew it—but he could not help her.

"You see how it is—don't you, dear? Something happened to me. She's the only woman I'll ever love. If I can't have her—and God knows whether I'll ever find her or not!—it will be the end of things for me!" He said it quietly, but there was such conviction in his voice that against her will Victory believed him.

Yet how was it possible for any man to fall in love so suddenly? Her glance went past him to the

dim sala. She could see the faint outlines of the Delgarda portrait—that bad-tempered Grande Dame with the thin nose and the pinched-in waist, the one who would turn in her "tomba!" Then her eyes came back to Cecil, standing silent with that indefinable air of distinction; the outer man only a pale reflection—really—of the inner fineness of his spirit. There was only one Cecil in the world! She rose, and stood with her hands on the back of the chair. She looked tired, and sad.

As he watched her Crewe's heart ached. He remembered rather grimly how he had dreaded the time when she would fall in love and be taken away from him. Here was another one of life's little ironies! Elena had taken him away from Victory. There was a moment of silence on the balcony, then Crewe glanced at his wrist watch.

"It's midnight—why doesn't Paula come?" He ran down to the landing of the great sweeping staircase and stood there listening. A calesa rattled in the street outside the iron gates. The wet wind blew around his head. When he went back, Victory was on the top step.

"Cecil, listen! someone is running—out on the street; he's coming this way—don't you hear it?"

As Crewe turned his head, he did hear it—the iron gates clanged, and Victory caught his arm.

"He's coming in here!" she whispered. "Who is it?"

The running feet sped down the passage, then they saw the figure of a man dodging between the wet shrubs of the patio.

"Crewe! Where are you? Crewe!" A tumbled white figure came racing up the old stairway.

"It's Dr. John!" Catching him by the arm, Crewe drew him up onto the balcony. "I say, what's up? Where's Neil?"

Dr. John was breathless; the odd tropic pallor of his face had deepened until he was ghastly.

"They took him!" he panted. "They stole the key—then took *him!* I couldn't do a thing!" He glanced at their shocked faces—his swift tragic experiences of the last few hours had taxed Dr. John's endurance; he mopped his forehead with hands that trembled.

"Wait a minute! Don't hurry!" Crewe pulled up a chair. "Rest a second!"

Dr. John's eyes were dull, streaks of black grease were on his white clothes, there was a strange twisted expression around his mouth. He was a grotesque little figure on the edge of the chair.

"How frightful you look!" Victory brought him a glass of water. The doctor paid no attention.

"Wait, let me tell you what the devils did!" Crewe leaned on the balustrade, Victory perched on the arm of a chair, while he told them about the barricade—the guns—the naked greased man who had fought with Neil and stolen the key.

"Naked!" cried Victory.

"Greased—my God! never heard of such a thing!" said Crewe. "I say, you don't mean greased, do you? Covered with grease?"

"Everything!" with a gesture. "Plastered with coconut oil from head to foot! It's an old Malay

trick. And now I'm going to the Governor-General!" announced the doctor. "It isn't any use to talk to me this time, Crewe. I'm going!"

"Right-oh! And I'll go with you! But we'd best get all the information we can first. We can't go to the Governor-General at midnight without something definite. I'll telephone the Manila Hotel and get Carson on the wire. He may know where Mayhew is. But what do you suppose has become of Paula?"—in a worried voice. He hurried into the sala and they heard his deep tones and quick staccato sentences on the telephone. Victory and Dr. John waited in tense silence. In a few minutes Crewe was back—

"I got Carson—he was off duty, but I caught him in his room. Mayhew left the Hotel at half after six—with all his luggage!" The doctor turned an astounded face to Victory—

"Checked out!" he said.

There was silence on the long tiled balcony where the three looked at each other while water splashed in the fountain, rain beat on the roof and dribbled down the wide stone steps. They could watch the staircase, know who came up or went down, look out and see the rain-lashed patio, where shrubs swished and bent to the wind. Although the typhoon was still out on the Yellow Sea, its outriders were already swinging in, on angry gusts of wind that piled up black clouds in battalions.

"Mayhew is leaving Manila," said Victory slowly. "What else did Carson say?" Crewe looked at her with deep thoughtful eyes—

"He's trying to find Mayhew's roomboy; he's going to do a little detective work; these roomboys in the Orient know everything. Carson's to call me back in fifteen minutes." His sister's eyes were suddenly very bright, with a prophetic, intuitive look. She got up and with her pink draperies swinging began to pace the red and white tiled floor.

"And Ten Yen has the key! Then of course the *Che Kiang* can come in! Have you thought about that, Cecil? Why can't they put Neil on her, Dr. John? Wouldn't that be the best thing—for them? It's the safest place for them to keep him, isn't it?"

"Of course it would be—but would they dare? Dr. John, your warships are out there in the harbor; that's a long chance Ten Yen is taking if he puts an American on a Chinese boat." Crewe's stern eyes searched the doctor's. With his British respect for law, it seemed incredible that Ten Yen would attempt it. In China, yes—but many things not tenable elsewhere were done in China.

"Crewe, I don't know! I'm bewildered! If Ten Yen would come into my house and steal the key, then take Neil out from under my nose, in my own patio, by Jupiter—" The doctor shrugged, shook his puzzled head.

Victory's quick eyes traveled from one harassed face to the other. Then turning, she looked into the dark night. Out there, beyond Cavite light, was the *Che Kiang;* and out there lay the end of this amazing mystery. But here, at her feet, sulked the Walled City. From its inception a remorseless, brutal, and

cryptic place. Beyond the dark patio were other walls, other gardens, and crumbling churches; little secret cells and passages, that for hundreds of years had screened rape, cruelty, and intrigue. And beyond the constricted, medieval town—not more than a mile square—lay Manila's maze of streets, with native barrios swarming to the very foot of the high walls. Where, in the Far East, could Ten Yen and Mayhew have found another town so suited to their purpose?

"Do you think"—suddenly—"that Elena is here, in the Walled City, Dr. John?"

"My God—where would she be?" said Crewe sternly. "Of course she's here!"

"I don't know, Crewe," Dr. John had been turning it over in his mind. "I've been thinking about that. It would be mighty hard to hide Elena in the Walled City; she knows her way about too well. Besides, she's Spanish. Of course she speaks Tagalog, probably half a dozen other dialects. And then the name! The name!" The doctor sat upright. "Everybody knows it—Delgarda!—why, they've been Illustrados in the Islands for hundreds of years! I'll tell you, Crewe, even a Chinaman would be afraid to keep Elena a prisoner here long." The doctor's eyes were full of pity as he looked at Crewe. "Where's Paula?"

"She hasn't come." Frowning, Crewe got up and leaned against the balustrade. "But I say, Elena's got to be here, you know. They might have put her in the Mindora or some other half-caste hotel—I told Paula to go to all of them." A quick glance

flashed and crossed between the doctor's fiery eyes, and Victory's penetrating blue ones. Just then the tinkle of the telephone in the sala brought Crewe to his feet—

"It's Carson," he said, hurrying inside.

His long thin back had no sooner vanished around the door, than Dr. John rose and stood looking steadily down at Victory.

"Do *you* think—Victory—?

"Of course!" nodding. They stared at each other like conspirators afraid of what they had simultaneously discovered.

"Please give me a cigarette." Her voice was husky. "It doesn't matter if you haven't my brand, any brand will do." There was a moment of silence as the red spark of the match flared. "It's *damnable,*" she whispered, looking up, "isn't it?" Before Dr. John could answer Crewe was back, standing in the doorway, his face as white as his coat.

"Listen," hurrying over to them, "that was Carson. He'd got the roomboy. Before Mayhew left he did some buying in the hotel." Crewe's voice, which had been low enough, suddenly trailed off; he stood for a moment, speechless, looking at them.

"Go on," said Victory sharply, "what did he buy?"

"A woman's dressing case! An embroidered negligee—along with a Mandarin coat—and some other things—toilet articles." Crewe's lips were stiff, he could hardly form the words—he was shaken to the soul. Victory's eyes had never left his face.

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid—they're going to take her on the *Che Kiang,* Cecil," she whispered.

"My God!" Crewe dropped down on the arm of a chair, his tall figure sagging, his deep-set, unhappy eyes fixed on the dark square of the patio. The doctor, who had been standing with his hands in his pockets, his head bent, suddenly looked up. Hurried thoughts in his head had focalized.

"What about that launch? They'll have to use *her* to get back and forth from the *Che Kiang.* I'll telephone Brown—at the Customs, he's sure to be up—with this storm brewing. And I'll find out something about that damned boat!" He hurried into the sala, and they listened as his nervous high-pitched voice went singing over the wires. Crewe lifted his thin, haggard face.

"Victory, she came up those stairs to bring beauty, not tragedy into my life. But it seems as if nothing short of a miracle could help me find her." He took a deep breath, then straightened, and squared his shoulders. "Well, if I have to move heaven and hell—I'll find her!"

"Of course you'll find her!" but above his head Victory's eyes were serious. Would they find her? Was she already on the *Che Kiang?* If she was, could she be taken off? Or had the *Che Kiang* put out to sea? That thought filled her with terror.

"News! News!" The dramatic doctor returned like a small whirlwind. "Brown says a launch with a Chinese captain tried to run out of the harbor to-night. It's against the law for a launch to move about when the fifth signal's up. She refused to

stop; they had to chase her, and turn her back. She must be tied up somewhere along the Pasig."

"Señor! Señor!" A tired little voice spoke at Crewe's elbow, and he whirled. It was Paula, who had crept up the wet stairs and was standing close to them on the balcony. Absorbed in this tragic discussion, they had not heard her. She was very wet, bedraggled, a film of despair clouded her eyes.

"Paula!" cried Crewe.

"Paula!" Dr. John caught her arm. "Paula—did you find out anything?"

"Señor." Paula looked up at him piteously. "Señor—she iss lost! She iss gone! I find the bobo who wear hiss shirt inside—the one who drive el Señor Mayhew's ah-oo-to—"

"What's that?" asked Victory.

"Automobile," said the doctor.

"Si—I find him, but he will tell me nothing."

"But where was he? What did he say?" insisted the doctor.

"In Plaza Goiti. I go there. He iss a bad man. He say, no—your Señora and her amigo do *not* go into Intramuros—no. After the Jones Bridge—they are not in my ah-oo-to." Paula uttered a high pitched cry—the Tagalog wail for a lost person—and dropped to the floor.

"That means—the *Che Kiang!*" The voice was Crewe's. "Elena must be on Ten Yen's launch! They must have been trying to take Elena out to the *Che Kiang*—and bring the launch back so they could put Neil on it."

"If that's their plan, then she'll tie up some-

where on this bank of the Pasig," said Dr. John resolutely.

"We'll go at once!" said Crewe. "Dr. John, are you armed, ready?" His voice was hard and cold.

"I'm ready, but I'm not armed, Crewe. It's a good plan—but wait a minute. We'll need Paula. We can't find that Chinese boat tied up among all the bancas and cascos—she might be anywhere from the mouth of the river to Jones Bridge. But Paula can prowl about and ask questions of the natives, they won't notice *her!* But they'd spot us at once! We'll let her see first what she can find, and we'll wait up on the wall."

"Victory!" Cecil's voice snapped with command. "Get your automatic and give it to Dr. John. I'll get flashlights." While he went for them, Dr. John explained carefully to Paula what she must do. And as she listened, Paula's face changed, she stopped moaning—when they started down the stairs she ran ahead of them.

On the landing they looked back at Victory, watching them with brimming eyes, her pink draperies billowing around her.

"Good-by! Keep Pilar with you!" called Crewe.

"Good-by, Victory!" Dr. John glanced back once or twice as they crossed the patio.

At one o'clock in the morning the Walled City slept uneasily. Everyone, every house-boy, cook, cochero—every man, woman, and child, knew the fifth signal was up. The wind that wailed high above the old stone houses, swept through the tight little streets, shook the shell windows, and rattled

the tiles, carried a threat familiar to the dullest native. There were lights here and there in the second stories of the houses; people were sitting with doors and windows barred, waiting, hoping that the typhoon would veer and pass to the north. Some were praying in front of small shrines. As Crewe and Dr. John came out into the streets they felt disquiet hovering like a presence over the old town. Rude shutters were up in windows and doors, the storm had lulled, rain was coming in light gusts, behind the clouds was the faint radiance of the moon; and as they walked down Calle Linda, and turned into the street which led to the river, they had the feeling that people were all about, were awake and listening.

The Pasig was shrouded in mist. Standing for a moment in the dark gate, they saw the dim lights on the other bank reflected in the slow pale current of the water. They stared at the huddled, swarming native craft, where the only sound was water slapping against the boats, and the only sign of life was here and there a flickering candle. Dr. John whispered to Paula—

"Remember, Paula—a Chinese launch!" Then they watched her flit away like a shadow into the night.

## CHAPTER XXIII

WITH a long breath like a sigh, Neil came out of the enveloping darkness. There was a queer numb sensation in his legs, his head was sore, his arm ached. A confused singing hummed in his ears. For a long time he lay there, trying to collect his thoughts, trying to realize what had happened—where he was—why it was so wet and dark in here. He touched the floor—not tiled, but made of stones that were rough and corrugated. That was queer! The doctor's Spanish bed had been hard, too, but not like this. There were dancing lights in front of his closed eyes, then gradually they began to flicker away. He moved his head; it was on a hard pillow that felt rough against his cheek. This was certainly *not* the place where he had gone to sleep. He felt cold and dizzy—nausea gripped him, laid its clammy hand on his stomach, and every bone ached.

Then slowly, very slowly, he sat up, leaning his head back against something hard, probably the wall. He could see only the faintest dimmest outlines of other walls in the thick blackness. But the effort to sit up had cleared his brain a little. Memory in flashes was coming back to him. It came like pictures seen through a shutter which opens a crack, then closes; opens, closes. That was very

queer! He remembered the sala, the machete, the barricade, and the doctor keeping guard.—Oh, yes, he could see that. Then for a few minutes he was too tired to think again, to see any more, so he leaned his head back against the wall. Suddenly the shutter opened a crack and he saw the patio. He could see himself going down those strange steps with the doctor. And it was raining—curious that he could remember a sound like rain on a tiled roof. The iron gates against the white wall! He could see them, just as if they were printed on his mind. Now why should he remember them? But the next moment he knew why—they had looked uncanny, eerie—they had impressed him, like something evil. He pulled himself closer to the wall and sat up straighter. Something terrible had happened in that patio! Lord, how his head ached! Then he remembered—of course, he had been struck on the head. He put his hand up and touched it. No wonder it was sore! His hair felt wet, oily, sticky! What infernal stuff was on his hands? In the dark he smelled them—sickeningly sweet, with oil or grease oozing between his fingers. Grease! In one revealing flash it all came back to him. Grease—the naked native—his terror of him—the flight down the passage—the miraculous way in which the wet bushes had swallowed that gleaming, coal-black body. The suddenness with which he had melted like an animal into the shadows. Then the blow on his head. Ten Yen had won! That had been his last thought before he went down, down, into the black pit of lost consciousness. Ten Yen had won! By a fluke, yes. By—

what was it the doctor had shouted after him? The Malay trick! He had sent a native to steal his key! Reeling, Neil got to his feet and braced himself unsteadily against the wall.

The room was black except for a small square of dim light above his head—it looked like a window. He staggered over to it and peered up. Behind the branch of a tree he could see a patch of sky, with black clouds flying; behind them the faint nebula of the moon. He felt the wind on his feet, but when he stooped to let it blow against his hand he found himself in front of a door; the window was in the upper part. A heavy wooden door, rough on the inside, without latch or keyhole, and barred on the outside, for when he shook it, it didn't give an inch. After that he began to work his way around the room, step by step, feeling with his hands along the wall. It was so small he was soon back again by the door.

An empty stone room; tight as a fortress! He wondered if he was in the Walled City, or in one of those formidable old Spanish houses he had seen, or if he was in some other part of Manila, or in a prison? He felt his way back again to the pillow and sat down. What was going to happen to him? Would they leave him here now they had the key? And suppose they did?

There were Crewe and the doctor! By this time they would know he was gone. Crewe—a little thrill of hope ran through him, then it died away. Crewe was hunting Elena. But the doctor must have heard the Chinamen in his patio—wouldn't the doctor do

something? He knew the Governor-General. But how could the doctor find him? Mayhew and Ten Yen would not make any mistakes or leave any avenues of escape open. They were too experienced.

Neil looked at the window. Little splatters of rain were blowing against it. He wondered if the typhoon was coming in? That didn't matter now! They had the key, the *Che Kiang* could come in any time—and of course the *Che Kiang* would. How quiet it was! Not a sound but the wind in the trees and the rain beating above his head. The room smelt musty; a stale old odor as if it were seldom used, no flavor of people in it.

How long could he have been in this stifling hole? Wearily he dropped his head back against the wall and dozed a little. "Rest while you can," commanded an inner voice. "It will soon be morning!" All sorts of sick fancies went swimming through his head—over and over—around and around.

He heard a step! Then another! Very soft, pad-pad like the feet of an animal. Sibilant conversation seemed to be going on outside his door. Who could that be? He scrambled to his feet and stood with his back against the wall facing the door—his eyes wide open watching intently.

Inch by inch the door was opening, and Neil's hypnotized eyes never left its widening crack. He could see two people standing outside and looking in on him. One was a man dressed in white, and outlined against him stood a tiny black-cloaked figure in a pie-shaped hat.

It was Ten Yen! Nobody having seen that con-

tour once could forget it. Ten Yen stepped into the room, and the door closed instantly behind him. He was holding a dirty ship's lantern. Its light threw a pale gleam over the bare room, over Neil, his back flat against the wall.

The ship's lantern revealed the room's emptiness; there was not a chair or a stick in it—nothing! Neil had only his bare fists, and they would be quite, quite useless to defend him. For Ten Yen would have a knife! And outside there must be a guard. Trapped! He knew it after his eyes had once made the circuit of the room and come back to Ten Yen. There was a bitter little smile around Ten Yen's lips, a peculiar brightness in his black eyes, as he stood holding the lantern and looking Neil over, from his red hair down his whole husky length to his feet. The survey finished, Neil knew there was nothing about him for anybody to tell Ten Yen. He had a survey to make, too. His eyes roved over that long-lipped yellow face and the oddly twisted neck; over those black eyes shining with evil. Nobody could expect anything but subtle cruelty from a man who looked like that.

"Where is the key?" said Ten Yen.

Neil blinked—and frowned. Had the noises which were ringing in his ears confused him?

"Speak!" commanded Ten Yen sternly. "Where is it hidden?"

Below his thatch of red hair, Neil's brown eyes looked wary. Ten Yen's question was without meaning; he decided this was another form of attack.

"Why do you ask me? Your Malay stole it—

didn't he give it to you?" What new thing was this? Why did Ten Yen ask about the key, when *he* had it? Question after question beat in his confused brain—

"Malay—what do you mean—Malay?" Ten Yen's little bird's neck twisted as he glared at Neil. He held the lantern higher—closer—to Neil's puzzled face.

Was this another trick? Suddenly Neil knew that it was not; he saw amazed consternation in Ten Yen's eyes. He *didn't* have the key!

"The key," said Neil slowly, "was stolen from me by a greased native. I was chasing him into the patio when your men got me. I haven't the key —I haven't hid it—I don't know where it is!" The ring of sincerity was in his voice as he faced Ten Yen. Well, damn him! he would give him the truth, at least! But if Ten Yen didn't have the key—where in God's name was it?

Ten Yen had listened to him in petrified silence —then he searched his face—and stood for a moment thinking—abstracted—

"Shih," he said finally, "shih; truth is in the words."

A little hopeful feeling ran through Neil. Ten Yen believed him! Perhaps there was still a chance, then, to get out into the night—and freedom! Luck might be with him, after all!

"You know China?" Ten Yen was watching him.

"I have been in Kowloon," said Neil uneasily, wondering what the devil was coming now. Ten Yen didn't need to be told that he had been in Kow-

loon. Suddenly he had a quick presentiment of evil —not born of knowledge—but of intuition. It was a clear uncanny gleam, like a streak of lightning. He saw Ten Yen's free hand fumble in the sleeve of his black cloak, then he drew out a little folded slip of paper. He watched—as Ten Yen's fine yellow hand held it up.

"You have been—in other Chinese towns—shih?"

"Peking," admitted Neil reluctantly.

Ten Yen's eyes met Neil's—he shook the paper open.

"Where"—the words were almost whispered—"did you get—this?"

Almost whispered, but to Neil they sounded as if he had shouted them from the housetops. He stared hard at the paper—looked long and carefully at Ten Yen—uncertain—for a moment unbelieving. Then as their glances met Neil was very still—

"I got it in New York."

The brooding look of evil on the Chinese face deepened. His eyes glittered—under half-lowered lids; his figure bent forward in a paroxysm of rage, so terrible to watch that Neil backed farther and farther against the damp white wall.

"You carry this—shih—but why?"

Neil shook his head; he had nothing to say. A chill had settled on him. There was no chance.

"You have dangerous knowledge," Ten Yen said calmly, the paroxysm having passed. "I take you to the *Che Kiang*—shih; you will not talk—no; not if you have the lips of Buddh—and the teeth of a

snake—" He slipped the paper into the sleeve of his black cloak.

The tone sounded cold, and as final as death. All expression was wiped clean from Neil's face. He could not think—nor move—nor remember. He felt like a dummy image standing there. Every word that Ten Yen uttered had the ring of truth. He no more doubted that Ten Yen would do these things—than he had doubted him out on the balcony in Kowloon.

Suddenly footsteps sounded outside the door. Through a mist Neil watched Ten Yen turn his head away—listen a moment—to voices—then the door opened.

It was Mayhew.

"I say, Ten Yen—"

Neil looked up. What new villainy were these two devils hatching?

"The sixth signal's up; and the captain's got bad news. Come out of here." Mayhew glanced at Neil—"Did you get it?—Hell's to pay!"

Ten Yen said nothing. Without another look at Neil or at the room he turned, closing the door behind him. And again the room was dark, while Neil was left staring at the blank and heavy door.

Who in the name of heaven stole the key?

## CHAPTER XXIV

"PILAR!"

"Si, señorita!" Pilar came running through the sala and out onto the balcony. She looked sleepy. So many things to be happening in the old casa, so many hours to be awake! Ave Maria! Was it not after midnight now? Yet the señorita's eyes were as brightly blue as if they never intended to close again! Pilar looked searchingly at her, standing at the top of the stairs. Ah—que lastima! That a face as lovely as the Virgin's to be wet with tears! The señor Crewe and the simpático Señor Doctor had stormed out of the casa leaving her señorita alone. It was not costumbre! But when was a man, even an English Illustrado, known to be consideramente of his women? Men! Ah, bah—changing sweethearts as Pilar did her camisa! Was there not Vicente—and the little matter of the red beads in the shop of Fernando?

"It's late, Pilar. Where's Vicente?" A vixenish expression crossed Pilar's pretty brown face.

"Bobo! Psst! He sleeps in hiss room!"

"Well, turn out the lights. Close the sala doors. Every light, Pilar. I'm going to sit out here on the balcony—I like the dark. You lie down in my room."

After Pilar had gone Victory dropped into one of the big wicker chairs and sat staring at the dark

with its incommunicable thrill. She loved the night. There was no poetry in the daytime. But that fragrant darkness in which the animals moved and sounds and scents were so acute was full of poetry; unlovely daytime things were covered with a misty dreamlike mantle. Cecil used to come up to the nursery when she was a child to ask if she wanted the night-light left burning. But she never did. Cecil! She must not think of him. Time enough for that; it hurt too much. A marriage between Cecil and tempestuous, beautiful Elena—how could that end?

Victory shook her head. In a half-dream she heard the noise of vehicles passing the causeway from Avenida Bonifacio, and the faint whistle of a river boat. It was one o'clock—she heard her traveling clock strike. It was a warm, gusty night, with great billowing clouds high in the sky—and the drip of rain on the tiles.

Around, behind her, stretching with its wide balconies on either side, brooded the ancient house. It was like a person, old and very obese, who watches in the night. There were enormous empty rooms, bedroom after bedroom, kitchens, storerooms, servants' quarters enough to staff a large hotel. And the chapel at the extreme end of the left wing. A magnificent place when it was built. Even now, with much of its carved furniture gone, its pictures sold, it had a stately and faded splendor. At first she had been thrilled by living in it, but now she wished she had never seen it.

She rose and began walking quietly up and down

the red and white tiles. The wind felt a little fresh on her head. She could smell the lovely Dama de noche, and y'lang-y'lang, and the woodsy tang of ferns rising. It was certainly gloomy out here; her heart began to beat a little faster. In the faint glow of the moon behind the clouds she could see the fountain and the mango tree. Something mysterious, tragic, had settled over the old house. She was quite still, rigid, listening. There was a faint sound in the passage—could it be Cecil coming back—or—? Something more than the wind was moving in the patio! Leaning far over the balustrade, she looked down at it with dilating eyes. Something—or somebody—was moving about among the bushes.

She could hear feet in the cloistered passage directly beneath the balcony—they stepped in soft padded slippers. Victory hurried over to the chair where she had been sitting, snatched up the big black Spanish shawl which lay across it, and crept down to the landing. Her slippers made no sound on the wet steps, and wrapped in the shawl she was blacker than the shadows.

Should she call Pilar? But if she did Pilar would scream and pray to the saints. Then she saw the silver pencil of a flashlight shine from the cloistered passage! It darted across the fountain, into the cloisters, even over the staircase where she was crouching behind the vines. Probably someone—some intruder—who did not know the house was rented. She saw a figure move toward the fountain; it was tiny, wrapped in a fluttering black cloak, wearing a pie-shaped hat. The next minute it had

vanished under the black and gloomy arches.

Ten Yen! She felt an icy wave of terror as she clutched the balustrade. Then slowly it ebbed, subsided. What was Ten Yen doing in the patio of the Delgardas? Here was an old, subtle, evil intelligence; he had beaten Cecil and Dr. John. He had taken Neil away, and Elena. He might even be going to one of them now. The next minute she saw the flutter of his black cloak in the passage. A new thought, swift, hot, impetuous came to her! She would follow him! Gathering her shawl around her, she slipped down the steps. She would find out where he went! Skirting the fountain and keeping close to the wall of the passage, she hurried out into the street.

She could see him about a block away, walking with his head bent and his coat billowing behind him. She knew they passed storm-swept streets; she had a general idea of the direction in which she was going; she knew, too, that she must not get too close—so once or twice she paused an instant in a doorway. Her eyes were photographic: the worn stone step, the old nail-studded door, with its heavy Spanish lock and hinge—she would always remember them. Then she started on again after that fleeting little person.

Ten Yen walked remarkably fast, with a sliding sidewise movement as if he skimmed the ground. Rain beat down on her face; she covered her hair with the black shawl, and soon rain was dribbling through the crêpe. One square—two squares—around the corner. With increasing excitement she

realized that they were nearing the Mindora Hotel.

Ten Yen did not pause in front of the hotel, so black that not even a farthing candle was showing in its windows. The heavy doors were closed tight against the night. And still that little black cloak fluttered on ahead; and still he was pursued by another figure, as slight, as dark, as quick moving. If Ten Yen had paused to look around—but he didn't! He was in a hurry. They turned another corner, and in the middle of the block he whipped into an alley. Victory slowed up; there were pails and refuse here—she must not stumble or make a noise. Half a block down she could see Ten Yen slip into a door set in a wall. She hesitated; the door looked secretive, the wall was very high. Anything might be happening there—inside. It was sheer folly of course to go farther, and yet— If Neil or Elena were hidden in the Mindora! She took a quick breath and hurried on.

Ten Yen had left the heavy door ajar. She slipped along the wall until she could look inside. The garden was gloomy, a wet mass of blowing shrubs and trees, and high above it gleamed the white balconies of the hotel. This was the place that Neil and Cecil had raced through when they left the Mindora. Sliding inside the gate, she saw a path, lined with high shrubs, leading to the right wing of the hotel. Fastened far up on the shrouded balconies, an old ship's lantern threw swaying lights down on the patio. In front of a wide door sat a sullen-faced mestizo on a wooden stool. He was holding a lantern, and in the shadow near him stood Ten Yen.

The door had a great wooden bar which dropped down into an iron hasp, and the mestizo appeared to be on guard before it. Stooping behind the shrubs, she watched and listened. Somebody was a prisoner in that room. Was it Elena? Or was it Neil? The mestizo was surly and impatient; she heard him grumbling to Ten Yen.

"There iss to be no trouble here—or it will mean the Jefe!"

"No—no trouble—fool! Before the sun rises, I take him to China," said Ten Yen. "Open the door!"

So it was Neil! And they were going to take him to China. She crept a foot or two closer. She saw the mestizo slowly lift the wooden bar of the door, and hand his lantern to Ten Yen, who stepped inside. After that the mestizo came back and sat down again on his little stool. Pressed close against the shrubbery Victory waited, straining her ears to hear. She could have screamed with excitement and suspense! She was alone here, with no one to help her! A life might depend upon her clear quick thinking. Suddenly a wild thought, born of the dark and her feeling of desperate responsibility, struck her. A steely glitter sparkled in her eyes. She caught her firm hands together and bit her lip between her teeth.

When Ten Yen came out!—

She looked at the barred door—the surly cur of a mestizo—the dark and silent hotel; then her eyes drifted to the ship's lantern. High up behind those spreading balconies guests were asleep—back of these thick lower walls servants were stretched on

their hard petates. In front the Mindora turned a blank face to the world—the street. But in the rear deviltry took its own inexorable course. As she looked around she thought Ten Yen could not have chosen a better place. Hidden under the trees, she waited. It seemed a long time. What was happening in that thick-walled room? Not a breath of sound came from it! When she thought of what Ten Yen might do— Her eyes dilated in the dark! The mestizo yawned—stirred uneasily—once he glanced back toward her piece of shrubbery. Then she heard steps in the alley! The quick firm steps of a white man. She was not surprised when she saw Mayhew walking down the path. He was in a hurry and he passed so close that she could have touched him. But even he, with his suspicious nature, would never have dreamed that a white girl was hiding behind the shrubbery of the Mindora. She heard him call to Ten Yen—saw the door open—watched Ten Yen come out. He handed the lantern to the mestizo.

"Hurry, for God's sake! The launch has been turned back once—there's bad news—we'll have to run for it!" Mayhew said.

Ten Yen turned to the mestizo; raised his long arm in a gesture of command, and the mestizo nodded—

"Si," he said. Then he looked after them as they hurried through the patio and out of the gate. Pulling his stool around he sat down again, facing the hotel. Victory lifted her eyes to the black night, the damp skies, the wind and the storm. A heady feeling of exaltation, of triumph, ran through her.

She was going to do it! She crouched there, planning in detail. They hadn't counted on an English girl. Leaning far out of the bushes she watched the mestizo. He was restless, uneasy, as if he wished this business safely over. He rocked back and forth on his little stool, keeping his eyes on the dark balconies of his hotel. Slinking, moving like a cat, Victory began stealing toward him. She was blessing the swish-swish of the trees and rain which deadened every sound. Closer, closer she crept, while the mestizo rocked and yawned. What a fool! What a fool! Closer, until she was not more than five feet away from that drooping, unconscious back.

Suddenly she whipped the great black shawl from her shoulders, opened it, and with one swift movement dropped it over the mestizo's head, giving him a violent push. He went down with a frightened gasp, choked by the heavy strangling crêpe, fighting the fringe, clutching, clawing rolling, trying to free himself from the folds of silk.

Victory rushed to the door, lifted the wooden bar, swung the door wide. She could see nothing inside.

"Are you Neil Winton?" she spoke low, into the darkness. She heard somebody come to his feet with a bound.

"My God! yes—who are you?" It was an incredulous tone.

"I'm Victory Crewe! Come, hurry—don't wait a minute!" She turned, flying along the path, her draperies blowing. She could hear his swift feet coming, and at the gate she threw him a fleeting look over her shoulder.

"Hurry—we haven't a moment—we may be followed!" They ran down the alley and turned into the quiet street. Wind whipped Victory's clothes, ruffled her hair, rain stung their eyes. On and on they raced, and at last they turned into Calle Linda. As Victory saw the old casa still ahead of them, she wondered if they were being followed? If they would make it? Her high heels caught in a broken cobble—she stumbled, and Neil lifted her up. They raced through the iron gates, down the passage, into the patio—to the landing, with the great house lying still and dark in front of them. She knew at once that nobody had come home.

"Cecil and Dr. John are hunting Elena!" she explained, breathlessly. "Come on up into the balcony!" She hurried ahead and snapped on the lights, then turned to look at him. He was very pale; little clots of blood were on his forehead.

"You've been hurt! Sit down here; don't try to talk"—pulling up a big comfortable chair—"I'll get you something to drink." When she came back his tired bewildered face was turned to her.

"How did you find me? How did you know where I was? I can't understand it." She looked down at him.

"Ten Yen came here—he was prowling in the patio. I was sitting in the dark, waiting for Cecil. I felt sure if I followed Ten Yen I'd find out something about you—or Elena."

"Well, you did! But by George! it took courage." Neil's brown eyes were warm with admiration. "Not one woman in a thousand would have thought of it. It's the pluckiest thing I ever heard of!" His

smile was wan, but full of its usual infectious charm. Victory understood why Cecil and Dr. John had felt such an instant liking for this young American.

"Of course I was afraid"—she smiled a little as she lit her cigarette—"but"—then she stopped abruptly. Steps sounded along the passage—in the patio—on the landing—Neil got up slowly; Victory ran to the head of the stairs. "They're coming!"

Dr. John was ahead, Crewe was half-carrying a drenched and exhausted Elena, and Paula's chinelas pattered in the rear. At once there was a confused babble of voices—excited exclamations, a rising chatter like a magpie brood, as everybody talked and tried to explain at once. Dr. John's astounded blue eyes looked at Neil as if he had seen a ghost, while Victory, casually told them what she had done.

"My Lord, what a girl! What a girl!" Dr. John shook an admiring head—"wrapping a Spanish mestizo in one of his own shawls!"

"But Elena!" cried Victory.

Crewe and Paula had been bending over Elena, lying on the big couch. Her black hair was cloudy about her face, her lashes heavy against her cheeks, which had the golden pallor of Spanish women.

"I am so soree, señorita," her great eyes opened slowly and looked up at Victory—"it iss so great trouble I am making." And Victory thought how much more beautiful she was to-night, distressed, pathetic, than she had been when she came to claim the jewel-box.

"Elena must go to bed!" interposed Dr. John firmly. "Paula, get a room ready for your mistress. Victory, tell her what to do."

"Wait—I'll call Pilar," said Victory.

But before Elena left the balcony she paused in the doorway to look up at Crewe, blond, wet, haggard—

"I will pray the saints to reward you, señor—si," she said gently. "It iss in my heart—what it feels"—she laid her hand across her breast with a quick graceful gesture—"it iss that I cannot say it, no." But her dark eyes spoke for her.

Victory, leaning against the balcony, watched them go. Dr. John was leading Elena. When they were safely out of earshot she turned to her brother—

"Cecil, what happened!"

Crewe, who had been so absorbed in Elena that he had spoken only briefly to Neil, came forward now, smiling and holding out his hand.

"I say, old chap"— For a moment he was too moved to speak—but he didn't need to; it was all in his face. The two men shook hands silently, warmly; then Neil looked at Victory.

"I can never tell you how I felt, Crewe—when I heard your sister's voice. It was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

"Sporting, wasn't she? It took quick wit and courage, didn't it?" putting his arm about her proudly.

"Nonsense." Victory shrugged. "I want to hear about Elena!"

"It was the most appalling thing I ever saw in my life," said her brother, wincing. "Mayhew brought Elena down to the Walled City with a trick—just as we thought—" He glanced at Neil. "He promised to give her the key. Then just below the Jones bridge he forced her from the motor car, and took her on the launch, and left her there. The captain was to get her out to the *Che Kiang*. But he was turned back by the Customs."

"That's what Mayhew meant by 'Hell's to pay,'" said Neil.

"Paula," continued Crewe, "prowled along the river bank and finally found the launch. The Chinese captain and a coolie were the only ones aboard —and of course they had knives. But Dr. John held the captain with his automatic while I went down to the cabin. I looked in—but I couldn't go in—for a minute. I've never seen such a picture—I'll never forget it—no matter how long I live. It was a filthy hole, smelling as if generations of Chinamen had lived and died in it. There was a dirty ship's lantern hanging beside a window hidden with ragged matting. And Mayhew had left her there—Elena!" Crewe's voice had a quality that made Victory shiver. "She was crouched on a bunk against the wall—Victory." Crewe pulled his sister close against him. "If you could have seen her—in her evening frock, with all her diamonds—and her white face staring at a Chinaman sitting flat on the floor with a knife— My God! It was horrible!"

Neil put up a protesting hand.

"Shut it out, Crewe, forget it! After all, she's

safe! Don't think of it again!" he said quickly.

Victory's shocked face—her silence—the close pressure of her body against Crewe's were her only reactions for the moment. But secretly she was appalled. Never in her life had she been so conscious of evil presences; or of the thin borderline which lies between safety and—danger! How easy, to have taken Elena to the *Che Kiang!*

"It's frightful—I didn't know there were people in the world like Mayhew and Ten Yen!" Leaning her head back against Cecil's arm, she looked at the sky that was heavy with brooding storm; then slowly her glance drifted around to Neil. "If only *something* could have been done to prevent Ten Yen from getting the key!"

Neil, from his low chair looking up at them, thought how steadfast—courageous—vivid she was! Not one woman in ten thousand would have taken the risks she did to-night; yet she had dismissed them—casually. As he started to speak, Dr. John came out on the balcony.

"I want to bandage your head, Neil—then it's to bed for you!"

Neil rose—he glanced around at the three grave, strained, friendly faces.

"Ten Yen didn't steal the key," he said quietly. "I found that out to-night. He asked me for it. I told him it was stolen by a Malay—"

Crewe interrupted him. "I say—do you mean Ten Yen hasn't the key?"—excitedly. "Then who the devil *did* steal it?"

## CHAPTER XXV

THE sixth signal was flying! Although the typhoon ravaging the Yellow Sea might slip away to the *south,* danger was so close that the beautiful big churches were all open and filled with Filipinos praying to the saints for the safety of friends or relatives in the unprotected districts of San Nicolas and Pasay. It rained in freakish gusts, the skies were dark, the wind was strong with a singing hum which struck terror to natives living in the open sweep of bay. In the patios of Manila and the Walled City, along Calle Burgos and other wide streets, the trees shivered with premonition. All Manila seemed to be waiting—expectantly, breathlessly— People idled in the shops, neither buying nor selling—waiting! Boats in the harbor were active with sailors strengthening their moorings, or getting up steam to help them hold their anchors, or reefing their sails, their eyes on the sky. They too were—waiting! Even the solemn warships felt the strain, for there was a scurrying of blue jackets on board, but no blithe dashing to and fro of officers' gigs, and the Admiral's barge.

Casa Delgarda was very quiet. The exhausted group of people had slept far into the morning. Pilar had been busy with tea and coffee. Vicente had rushed from one bedroom to the other. But

a strained silence lay between the two servants. It had to do with the matter of the red beads in the shop of Fernando. Vicente had explained, but Pilar refused to listen.

"I go to buy them, verdaderamente, Pilar—but they are gone!" Pilar sniffed.

"How you are a liar, Vicente! For one month the beads are there, si—have I not watch them? Have I not flat my nose on the window—and then—psst-psst—they are gone! Have shame, Vicente, I tell the padre." It was with a very heavy heart that Vicente served the toast.

At one o'clock Neil came out on the balcony and looked up at the gloomy threatening sky. The humidity was intense; it was too hot to lift a finger. He glanced down at Vicente, a little dejected heap squatting on the top step.

"Vicente, do you think the typhoon is coming in?" The little Filipino lifted cloudy black eyes.

"Si, Señor—I think. It iss the sixth signal flying."

Since his interview with Ten Yen, Neil had understood what rare and unusual cargo was on the *Che Kiang*. No wonder Ten Yen wanted the key! No wonder he had been trying to keep the *Che Kiang* in that hidden cove outside the Cavite light! Could he escape this terrific impasse? On one side was the Customs—on the other the typhoon! Neil glanced at the sky again; and then spoke to Vicente.

"Vicente, get your master and Dr. Norton, please!" It was the voice of authority; Neil knew

there was no time to waste. After one startled look at his face, Vicente shuffled away, and in a few moments Crewe and Dr. John came hurrying out.

"Come here!" said Neil abruptly. "Vicente says the sixth signal is up—the typhoon must be close to Manila. Ten Yen will have to bring the *Che Kiang* in! And I've found out that her cargo is contraband! He's going to try to run the Customs, and unload under cover of the storm. He knows that no one will interfere with him while the typhoon is raging."

"How did you find out that her cargo's *contraband?*" Crewe looked startled—and Victory, coming out from the sala, stood listening.

"I'll be damned if I understand," said the puzzled doctor.

"I found it out from Ten Yen last night," answered Neil. "I found out a lot of things. I know too much—Ten Yen is afraid of me—that's why he was planning to take me to China. I know what's on the *Che Kiang*. I know why he wants the key!" His brown eyes snapped. "Why, Crewe, you'll hardly believe me when I tell you what's on that boat!"

"Dammit! Dammit! Why don't you go on and tell us?" The doctor was fairly sputtering with excitement.

"Wait!" Neil held up his hand. "First you must know why they had to have the Delgarda key. Ten Yen, Mayhew, and Delgarda have been smuggling stuff from China. Right under the noses of our warships, by George! The nerve, the audacity of

them! And now I'll tell you why they had to have Ramón Delgarda with them. He was of good family and would not be suspected. He could speak Spanish; he lived in the Walled City, near the river; they needed his house—"

"That's why Ten Yen was prowling here last night!" Victory's quick penetration caught it. "I thought by the way he used his flashlight that he believed the house was empty!" Dr. John, who had been standing with his head down, doing some serious thinking, suddenly looked up.

"Ramón didn't even tell Elena that he'd rented the casa," he said slowly. "He told me not to mention it to anyone. I thought it was only false pride, but of course I see now—he didn't want Ten Yen to know."

"They've been storing their stuff here, and when they lost the key they lost the place to put it!" said Neil succinctly. Light broke on the doctor.

"That's it! That's it! Of course they tried to kill you, in the gate! Of course they wanted to take you to China! I'm surprised you escaped at all." Neil's eyes met Victory's for a moment—

"But what's on the boat? What *is* her cargo?" She looked over the balcony, at both wings of the house. "Where do you suppose it's stored? It's like living over a volcano—"

"You've not been safe a moment since you came here, Crewe," said Neil gravely, "Of course you didn't know it, but this is a sinister old place—it hides a dangerous secret. The *Che Kiang* carries jades, porcelains, small bronzes, one of the finest

vases in the world; treasures impossible to duplicate; they're as old as the Sui-T'ang and Ming dynasties." He checked them off on the balcony railing with his finger. "That's her cargo!" When he looked about the circle of astounded faces, the silence on the balcony was so profound that they could hear the far-away swish of waves on the Luneta break-water.

"How did you find it out?" Crewe's keen, penetrating eyes were watching him. "You seem to know a great deal." As he turned from one fascinated face to another, Neil, realizing how wholly these people had taken him on faith, had an embarrassed moment. Then something quivered in his voice as he began to talk, and when he leaned forward there was a repressed excitement about him that astonished them.

"That Delgarda key," he said slowly, "has played the devil with my plans. It's hurt me, but it's helped me too. Three months ago I left New York with instructions to negotiate for certain art objects for the Ransome Galleries. Some of them were in the Peking Museum." He turned to Crewe. "I couldn't tell you about it, for there were other buyers in the field, and Mr. Ransome's instructions were explicit. I bought a few things, but I found out immediately that looting had been going on in the museum for months. Nobody knew anything, nobody would tell me anything. I went out to the Forbidden City and wandered up and down those brilliantly painted buildings for days, but whenever I asked a question I met blank faces." Frowning, he stared at Crewe.

"It was the most devilish situation. Finally I made friends with one of the old custodians—a character. He was a withered old Chinaman who loved the jades, porcelains, bronzes—I went to his compound and he told me stories about them, while he smoked his long pipe. It was breaking his heart to have his treasures disappear one by one from the museum. After I had gained his confidence, I asked him to come to the Hotel de Peking, and I showed him a picture of the vase Mr. Ransome was especially keen about." Victory started.

"Was the picture on a slip of paper, folded in a map?"

"Yes; how did you know that?" Neil looked at her curiously. "I left it in the Mindora. Ten Yen brought it to me last night. When I saw that little slip of paper, I was sure my life wasn't worth—a Chinese cash! Ten Yen knew that I had too much knowledge. But to go back to Peking— Finally the old custodian talked—a little. Spoke about a big General—in China. But when I asked his name, he stopped talking!"

"Ten Yen!" There was an odd light in Crewe's deep eyes, "and your custodian was taking his life in his hands—when he told you even that."

"Yes, Ten Yen!" Neil's face hardened. "When we faced each other last night over that slip of paper, I *knew* who had looted the Peking Museum! And Ten Yen *saw* that I knew it! And at the same instant he realized that I'd found out what was on the *Che Kiang!* Manila is the one place in the Far

East from which things can be shipped duty free into the States. So Ten Yen knew *why* I was here! It's not surprising that he planned to kill me!"

"Although the old custodian told me that the treasure had been sent here—to Manila—he couldn't tell me where it was hidden. All he could say was—'Velly velly high up big wall! Allee samee like Chinese city! Velly, velly damn hot!' In despair I decided to come down from Peking, look about a bit and see what I could find. But it was a forlorn hope! At Shanghai I missed the liner, had to take a small coastwise boat which brought me into Hong Kong in the night. If I had landed in the daytime; or if I had gone across to Hong Kong instead of staying in Kowloon," his serious eyes traveled from Crewe to the doctor—"if I hadn't stopped by the Moon Gate and picked up the key, I'd never have known that the loot from the Peking Museum is on the *Che Kiang*! Because I never would have come in contact with Ten Yen! Just see what a thing of fate the Delgarda key has been for me." Neil straightened; suddenly his brown eyes flashed. "If the *Che Kiang's* forced in—you see what that means, don't you? They'll have to tie up in the river, probably, and unload. Damn it—that cargo's contraband! I'm going to see where they tie up, what they unload, and where they put it!" There was a fighter's thrust to his chin, as he stared around the breathless little circle.

"I'm in on this," said Crewe decisively. "Neil, if you can prove that Ten Yen's been looting the

museum, he will be discredited, done, absolutely! There's nothing more hopeless than a Chinaman who's lost face. By Jove, what a surprising turn! It seems strange that he would undertake a thing as dangerous as this!"

"That Chinaman would brave hell itself," said Neil ironically.

"They believe that in Kowloon, and I've even heard it in Peking." Crewe was thoughtful. "You know we had some oil concessions in South China, but the province was controlled by Ten Yen. Sir Eric, our Under Secretary, found out that Ten Yen was going over our heads to the Japanese. He was running true to form, wasn't he?" watching Neil—"I came to Manila to get maps of that district, from the Standard Oil geologist, Dr. Richards. They were charted secretly, by a Japanese. And the only other two were lost in the Tokio earthquake, so this set was very valuable, and Ten Yen wants them. He *has* to have them. But Dr. Richards is in Singapore, and I've been waiting for him to come back. I hoped to get the maps before Ten Yen turned up. You can see, Neil how completely I'm in on this."

Dr. John's bristling little head shot up—his blue eyes were snapping.

"Look at the grief that Chinaman's made for all of us! Hell and Santa Maria! I'm in on this too!" What perfect sports they were—Neil caught his breath!

"He'll run the Customs—he'll unload during the typhoon—for it's his only chance! But we'll be there

to watch him. I've been thinking it all over since last night, and there's nothing else for him to do."

A slight sound made them all start, and glance toward the sala—

## CHAPTER XXVI

ELENA stood in the high carved doors. Behind her was the great dim sala, the Spanish furniture, and the Delgarda portraits in their tarnished frames. Her head was on one side, wistful, appealing. In her hands, pressed against the dull rose of her frock, was a carved silver box. As she spoke the group at the table turned to look at her.

"Buenos días—señores!" Crewe, with an odd radiance in his face, went to meet her.

"Oh—Elena! But do you think it was wise to get up now?"

She looked at him; a faint color rushed to her cheeks; her lips curved in a smile. Oblivious to the three people watching them, they stood for a long moment in the sala doors, while Dr. John muttered to himself. Anyone could see how *that* was going to end, by Jupiter! Poor Victory! He shot a glance at her from under his frowning brows. But she was remote, thoughtful, a little cold, as her blue eyes watched the scene in the carved doors. His glance shifted to Neil—if only *he* might make it up to her. Who knew? Perhaps he might.

"But it iss impossible to rest, Señor Crewe." Elena's low voice trembled a little. "You see, first I must make penance. It iss very important—Paula

has been to the hacienda for me." She turned away from him, and came swiftly across the balcony to Victory, who looked up at her, mystified. Then her face changed—she had recognized the silver box.

"I am veree soree, señorita." Elena was holding out the lovely jewel case with the Delgarda crest. "I think I am one devil—si. That I could be so bad! Here iss the box—you will take it? So Elena can say an Ave—? Si?" Her doubtful smile as she looked at Victory, her delicious accent, the swift surrender of her pride, said more than Elena's English could ever express.

Victory glanced once at Cecil; then she rose very slowly, and for a moment the two girls looked at each other. Crewe watched them with his heart in his eyes. They were the perfect flowers of two races. He recognized it with a quick surge of pride.

Victory flushed. "I was a perfect beast too, Elena. I'm sorry—frightfully sorry"—taking the jewel box—"I just adore this ducky box—a thousand thanks." Dr. John sighed gustily.

"Well," he began, "I'm going—" But it was never told. None of them had noticed the rising wind, or the heavy blackness of the sky—but now, with one sudden appalling shriek, the typhoon struck!

"Dios!" It was a scream from Elena as the tall porch lamp whirled and fell, and the furniture began to hurtle along the balcony.

"The typhoon! The typhoon!" shouted the doctor. "Get inside! Hurry!" The tea table spun over with a crash, throwing the fragile china into hun-

dreds of glittering pieces on the tiles. Crewe threw an arm about Elena and hurried her into the sala. Side by side Neil and Victory raced along the balcony.

"Close the doors! Batten them down as tight as you can! I'll bring in the furniture!" Dr. John staggered about pulling chairs and tables into the sala, while Neil and Victory ran through the empty rooms that faced on the three-sided balcony to close and lock the shell windows.

"What a frightful sound!" panted Victory, as the wind whirled the casements out of her grasp.

"Here—let me!" Neil's stronger fingers wrestled with them. "Is the street side of the house fast? The wind is coming from the bay."

"Yes! Vicente put bars on all the windows when the sixth signal went up! Did you ever hear anything like that wind?" She put her fingers over her ears.

The old house trembled and shivered. In the patio a tall palm went down with a crash! Its bole snapped with a report like a pistol! The high iron gates at the street entrance flew open and struck the sides of the passage with a metallic explosion that stunned them.

"My God!" cried Neil. "It sounds like the end of the world!" They ran back to the sala with white faces. Crewe and Dr. John were strengthening the big doors—Elena stood erect in the center of the room. Her eyes were wide, but there was no fear in her face. The old Delgarda house had seen many typhoons.

Pilar came running into the room, her brown face stiff with terror. In this stress she wanted her own kind. She dropped at Elena's feet in a huddled little ball. Elena bent and spoke sternly to her in Tagalog—and Pilar bowed her head, sobbing out a prayer.

The great casa groaned under the vicious fury of the wind. The rain struck the roof and sides of the house like metal volleys from machine guns. The voice of the typhoon increased until it was a howling, screaming discord of sounds like the diapason of elements, suddenly gone mad.

Outside—in patios and along streets—trees were being uprooted as if plucked from the earth by giant hands. Live wires curled and hissed on the ground, street cars stood helpless on their tracks, automobiles and calesas whirled into the first convenient shelter, the broken pavements and cobbles were wiped clean of pedestrians—in ten minutes there was nothing living anywhere to be seen. All the business, the teeming bustling life of the great sprawling city had ceased as suddenly as if some prodigious force had shut off every vital current.

Manila was delivered into the ferocious grip of the typhoon! The seventh signal was up!

In the Delgarda sala Crewe, Neil, and Dr. John were talking in excited voices. With her hands pressed to her ears to shut out the horrifying sound of the wind, Victory watched them.

"The *Che Kiang*'ll come in now. Lord, hear that wind!" said Neil.

"That Chinaman's held her outside Cavite just

as long as he dares," said Dr. John. "Of course he hoped the typhoon would veer, but there's no chance now! She'll pound to pieces! Ten Yen can't afford to lose his cargo! That boat's coming in!"

"Crewe, have you a raincoat?" Neil's blazing brown eyes were turned to Dr. John. "Where'll she dock? Let's get ready!"

"I suppose she'll come in outside the west breakwater and make for the mouth of the Pasig," answered Dr. John, turning up his collar. "If they can land they'll have a fighting chance to unload her. The Customs won't bother them during the typhoon. Crewe, what time is it?"

"Three o'clock!" Crewe looked at his wrist watch. He had to lift his voice above the shriek and pound of the wind. "How long will it take her to run in?"

"An hour—perhaps longer. And believe me, she'll come racing. If she unloads in the Walled City, she may tie up near old Fort Santiago. We can go down to the bastion where we'll be a bit protected, and watch the river."

Crewe was buttoning himself into a cravenette; he handed a slicker to Dr. John, a raincoat to Neil. They each took flashlights and automatics.

The sala was dim, with a stifling hot breathlessness that seemed to increase. Little currents of wind raced along the floor, pools of water were forming under the sala doors, the great shell windows on one side of the room stretched and strained. Vicente came rushing in with long poles for braces.

"Is the house safe?" Crewe looked anxiously at Elena.

"Oh, si, señor—it iss perfectly safe," came the calm voice of Elena, who was directing Vicente where to put the poles. "There iss no danger in this casa. I have seen many typhoons. It iss the nipa huts—the strong material houses—they go down—down! Señorita, Pilar should put all your things far away from the window. It iss impossible to keep out so much wet—si."

Victory started for her bedroom, but turned back before she reached the door.

"Are you going now?" looking anxiously at her brother. He nodded.

"Good luck then! Be careful!" With Pilar at her heels, she vanished into her room.

"We'll have to go down by the balcony—Vicente has barred the inner stairs that lead to the passage," said Crewe. "Come, let's be off!" He smiled back at Elena, who was watching him from the far end of the sala, and then opened the sala doors cautiously.

Instantly the storm caught them, hurled them from his hands, with a force that almost shattered them against the walls of the house. Half blinded by the rush of wind and rain, the three men fought to close the doors. The water hissed along the tiled balcony as if the old house were a ship awash! The steps were waterfalls, slippery and precarious. They picked their way down into the patio, and on to the passage. The trees were like tortured things, branches snapped, vines were torn in long

tendrils from the walls. The wind raced through the tunnel-like passage with such terrific force that they had to bend almost double to breast it. Out in the deserted street the roar of the typhoon was appalling! They clutched each other to keep on their feet, as they turned down Calle Linda toward the Pasig. Once the doctor yelled something to them, but his voice was lost in the raging uproar of the tempest. It was a street that presented blind windows to an agonized world. Everywhere they could hear an undertone of creaking and groaning; the rain swirled into their faces, filling their eyes, their ears, and even their noses with stinging drops. Flung against the old stone houses by a hurricane blowing over one hundred twenty miles an hour, they crept along the pavements, gasping, choking, moving almost mechanically. The typhoon was like a live thing that tore and clutched and buffeted them from every side. It was like a savage beast catching at their legs, beating against their heads, striking heart and spirit out of them. And its high-pitched whine deafened them. Neil began to wonder if they could make it. The fury of this incredible storm gave him a strange isolated feeling as if he struggled alone in a world where only the elements were left.

Dr. John crept ahead. Once he turned and made violent motions to them. Then he beat his way back, throwing himself between them, catching at their arms. Suddenly they understood. They were about to pass one of the great gates that opened toward the bay. The rush of wind through that funnel-like

arch nearly swept them from their feet. Staggering, Neil shot a glance through the opening. He caught a brief glimpse of the wide avenue, and as he wiped the beating rain out of his eyes he saw a huge tree topple over as easily as if it had been pushed by unseen hands. Its broken roots waved in the air.

They were numb from the vicious lash of the wind, the driving, pouring force of the rain, when at last they reached old Fort Santiago, and dropped down in the precarious shelter of its gray streaming walls. It seemed almost incredible to Neil and Crewe that the elements could so suddenly produce the savage, menacing fury of this typhoon. They tried to look at each other, but their eyes stung from the keen cut of the raindrops; they tried to talk, but the wind blew the words from their lips. Finally Dr. John came close and put his mouth against Crewe's ear.

"If we can creep around—to the front—of the bastion," he shouted, "we'll get some protection—can watch the river!"

Almost on their hands and knees they crawled around the great rough wall, along the runway to the sloping abutments of the bastion. Flattening themselves behind one of the thick projections, they looked down the Pasig toward the mouth of the river.

Everything rocked below them. The river struck furiously at the grim walls of the fort, then dropped back with a loud swishing sound. Through the streaming mists they could see boats, swaying,

turning, pitching, dragging at their anchors and their ropes. As he looked out over the river, Neil was astounded at the direction of the rain! It was as if all the water in the world was being poured from the heavens; it flew past his face in huge bucketfuls—and it paralleled the earth! And always above their heads, never ceasing for one instant, was the wild shrieking resonance of the wind —that whistled, and howled, and screeched!

For an hour they crouched there, huddled together in a little silent mass. It was impossible to talk—they could only wait! The storm was bringing an early dusk, the black clouds in the skies seemed to be settling heavily down upon earth and water. Neil wiped his eyes and stared down the river.

The slow time passed. He was beginning to feel that sleepiness that comes with any prolonged effort to master the elements. There was a little lull in the storm, that gathered itself for another outburst. Neil looked around the abutment—then he clutched Crewe's arm.

"Look—look!" he shouted hoarsely.

A freighter was coming slowly up the river, lurching and rolling in the most amazing and shocking manner! With infinite caution her captain steered her through the river craft. She looked battleworn and weary, as if her terrific struggle with the elements had been too much for her. Her mast was gone, her boats torn away—she had the air of a sick and saddened old man, who has been buffeted too hard by life!

On and on she crept, while the three watched her drunken flounderings. All eyes, and ears, and blurred rain-swept faces, they watched her slow progress. Reeling, careening, swaying as if to some gigantic formidable rhythm, she moved up the Pasig. On and on! They scarcely breathed! Would she never stop! Clinging to each other, they stretched their necks out over the wall, in imminent danger of having their heads blown from their shoulders, and stared at her. She passed directly beneath them. They could see the frightful havoc made by the typhoon—the battened companions, the wet hatches, the torn canvas. The wind shrilled along her decks, water poured over her sides, and still she came on. She passed the fort, and rolled on up the river.

Then, high on her stern, they could see the white letters—"*Che Kiang*—Kowloon!"

"She's docking farther up!" yelled the doctor. "Let's follow her!"

They crept down the narrow runway that led from the bastion and started along the river bank. The *Che Kiang* was ahead of them, lost in the mists. Here on the unprotected riverfront they were nearly thrown to their knees by the force of the typhoon. Neil's lungs contracted as if the life were being forced from his body—he was gasping for breath. The three men reached the old wall—then the gate where Neil was stabbed by the Chinaman, with its runway leading to the top. The effort to walk had taxed his strength to the utmost! Staggering up the runway he fell flat on the old wall.

His heart was throbbing—he felt spent, old. After a while he dragged himself to the edge of the wall and looked over the parapet.

The *Che Kiang* was lying below them. It was getting dark, with a sinister saffron colored light in the west. For half an hour the three watched the city, lying prostrate and black. Wreckage was everywhere—wreckage of trees, of telephone poles, of houses, of boats driven up on the river banks. Then night came. And still the howling demon of the typhoon swept in from the Yellow Sea! There was not a light in the city! Every wire was down. People were sitting in the dark waiting for the storm to pass. Another half hour, then the wind began to abate a trifle. Although it still shrieked and screamed, yet some of its fury had waned—the rain was slower—the typhoon was passing.

"Seven o'clock!" said Neil, looking at his illuminated dial.

But on the deck of the *Che Kiang* there was feverish activity; bobbing lights moved faster and faster—and then began dropping over the side; first one—then another—then two or three—at once. Something was being unloaded.

Neil clutched Crewe's arm.

"They're coming off," he shouted. "We must hurry."

Racing down the wide runway to the street, they followed the wall until they reached Calle Linda. Here they turned the corner, stopping once or twice to look back at the far end of the square where they could see a few lights coming toward

them. When they reached the tall iron gates of Delgarda Casa they hurried down the passage into the patio. It was a wreck. The areca palms were uprooted—the mango tree lay on its side—and the gray velvet fingers of the y'lang-y'lang were scattered up and down the passage. Crewe glanced up at the house but everything was dark.

"We can watch them come—and still have a chance to get under cover," he whispered. "Flashlights ready?—Guns all right?—Good!"

Peering from the arch of the passage, they watched a strange procession straggle up the street. Five men and three lanterns moving very, very slowly. They were heavily loaded and barely able to keep their footing in the wind. Ten Yen in his little black cloak fluttered ahead. It was beneath his dignity to carry treasure even from the Peking Museum. Mayhew, the Chinese captain, and two coolies held big Chinese baskets, their tops covered with tarpaulin. The number and the size of them made Neil gasp. Along the storm-littered cobbles, between the high walls bobbed the lanterns—all five men walking with their heads bowed to the wind.

Neil's mouth had an ironic twist. Precious old things stolen at great peril must not be broken!

"They're coming!" whispered Crewe. "Get back under the cloisters. We'll wait until they come out out of the passage into the patio—"

They could hear the measured pad-pad of feet in the street; strange guttural voices—a sudden snarl from Mayhew.

"Ready?" whispered Crewe.

Neil and the doctor nodded.

Then feet began to sound in the long dark passage.

"What are you looking at, Ten Yen—seeing ghosts?" The sneering tone was Mayhew's.

The dim unearthly light of the moon struggling behind the clouds—a black and silent house—a forlorn patio full of broken shrubs and trees—and three resolute men were facing the group from the *Che Kiang*. Flashlights streamed in the faces of Mayhew and Ten Yen and automatics sparkled.

"Drop that loot!" commanded Crewe.

There were squeals of horror from the coolies as they scuttled down the passage. With an oath Mayhew whipped out his gun but Ten Yen stood silent—rigid.

"You're done, Ten Yen!" Crewe's voice was icy.

It was as if Ten Yen had not heard him. He stared at Neil's red hair—and a queer superstitious awe looked out of Ten Yen's eyes. Anyone close to him might have seen his thin lips form the one word—"Three!" Then his eyes shifted—he sent a sidelong lightning glance into the cloisters—and the next moment Ten Yen was gone!

"Mayhew," said Crewe, "we know what you've got here. We're turning your boxes over to the customs and to the Governor-General in the morning. The Far East isn't big enough to hide a renegade Englishman as rotten as you are! Quit looting the museum."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head!" said May-

hew, then his automatic barked. Ping-ping rang through the patio.

"Neil—get back!" shouted Crewe—" throwing himself in front of the red head which was a target. Suddenly the click of a pistol spoke from Dr. John's direction—and then another—and another! Mayhew's arm dropped to his side.

"Crewe—Crewe," cried Neil, "are you hurt?"

"No, it went through my sleeve—damn him!" The English voice was furious.

Of all the *Che Kiang* group, only Mayhew with British grit had cursed, but stood his ground!

"Get back to your boat," commanded Crewe. "I'll give you one minute to get out of this passage!"

The three stern white faces stared at Mayhew across the Chinese baskets: filled with precious jade—and porcelains—and bronzes. Mayhew's eyes dropped; when he lifted them some of his old daredevil defiance shone for a minute in his face.

"You can go to hell!" He turned on his heel.

## CHAPTER XXVII

AT nine o'clock the scudding clouds had parted and the moon shone on the old Walled City. By ten the sky was almost clear; the wind had died; the warm heavy odors of bruised tropical shrubs and flowers rose from patios and gardens. When eleven o'clock pealed through the city, it was as if the typhoon had never been except for the appalling wreckage left behind it. On the Luneta, waves boiled over the breakwater; halfway up the beach beyond the Army and Navy Club a huge freighter lay on her side; in San Nicolas nipa huts floated on the tidal wave—but the typhoon had swept far out again and was scattering wrack and ruin to shipping on the Yellow Sea. The Eighth Signal was flying!

Along the Pasig bancas and cascos had pulled at their ropes until they overturned, and refuse floated on the water. The river was so high that it reached almost to the beautiful white bridges.

On the bastion of Fort Santiago a little brown figure stood watching the river. It was Vicente! His eyes followed a dismantled freighter cautiously weaving in and out through the wreckage to the open bay. High up on her stern he could see, gleaming under the moon, the white letters—

"*Che Kiang*-Kowloon."

He stood there motionless, watching, until her riding lights were only a dim blur at the river's mouth. There was a Malaysian glitter in Vicente's eyes and a little curl to his lips as he saw her go. Then he turned, walking slowly down the runway toward Delgarda Casa.

He could hear heavy seas in the harbor. There were no lights nor sounds in the town, for the exhausted city slept. He walked down the long passage to the patio of Casa Delgarda, past the fountain and the sundial which ironically maintained that it marked only the happy hours. There he stopped! Nothing moved—no one was about! A few mosquitoes buzzed—a few lizards crawled the walls. But the casa's two outspreading wings were dark—absolutely dark! He walked up to the landing and stood there a long time, listening. Then he went on up to the top of the stairs, and found the doors of the sala were wide open. The balcony was all in order. He walked through room after room of the great house—they were all empty! He came back at last to the balcony.

Then fear began to work in Vicente's mind. Where was his señora? And Pilar? And the señorita? What had happened? An hour ago he had helped bring up the Chinese baskets covered with tarpaulin. He had watched the Señor Crewe lock them securely in the great bedroom that overlooked the patio. The evil baskets of Ten Yen! Then he had gone down to the river, but now—Ave Maria! Even Pilar had vanished, like pale smoke from the clay kalanes on the cascos. Vicente crossed himself. He

did not like this dark and gloomy house where no human being moved; he did not like this absence of friendly human sound. He walked downstairs to the landing.

Then he heard something—faint—far away—coming from these dark corridors under the casa, for which he felt distrust. His eyes dropped to the cloisters. Was an unhallowed Delgarda ghost walking there tonight? His slender body in its white cotton union suit began to tremble. He crept on down until he stood under the arched passage, so high, so black, so full of unseen evil. He was afraid to go forward; he was afraid to go back! Suddenly far in the distance he heard the sound again. It was the faint echo of his señora's voice! Had the Delgarda ghost taken her away? He started to run down the corridor toward her.

The dark passages were winding, with many abrupt turns, and broken tiles were under his feet. The ceiling was so low that he could touch it, the walls so thick that the patter of his chinelas sent back a muffled echo. Ahead of him, around another turning lights wavered on the walls. He made that turn, then halted. Tense as a hunting dog! In front, standing at the top of stone steps which went down to Don Antonio's old door, was a group of people. He saw Pilar holding a long church candle that flickered in the draught, its tossing flame living and fantastic against the blackness. Her brown face looked back over her shoulder—Ave Maria! how Pilar had fear!

But they were all there—his señora, the English

people, and the Americano! Vicente sighed in relief. Yet they had not heard him. They were staring at Don Antonio's door, made of a massive slab of stone, its iron lock like that of a Spanish prison. He came up in time to hear his señora say—

"Don Antonio built the casa." Her low voice was resonant against the thick stone walls. "But he iss one veree bad man. He hass many women. He keep them here—ah, el bruto! His Doña Isabella iss the first bride of the casa. The key iss for this door."

Vicente nodded. He knew about the Doña Isabella. Tradition said she was so pure that the Virgin herself had carried her away. Vicente, standing in the low black dripping corridor, smiled. Of a truth, even more than his señora he knew about that door! He saw Pilar raise her candle higher. A greenish tinge was on her face. Pilar was petrified with fear. Por Dios! No wonder! An unholy door!

"Señora! Señora!"—

"Dios!" She turned. "It iss Vicente!"

Pushing through the little group of people, he stood looking down the slippery stone steps at Don Antonio's green door. With a triumphant gleam in his eyes, Vicente turned to his señora. The fingers of his closed hand opened slowly—and diamonds sparkled on his brown palm.

"Señora!" he said. "Look! It iss the key!" His black eyes swept the white astounded faces.

"Gracias á Dios!" The startled voice was his señora's! "Que esplendido! The Delgarda key!"

"The *key*," cried the señorita.

"That damnable key!" He knew why the English

señor frowned and bit his lip. But Vicente's side-long glances flew at once to the Americano, who looked hard at him.

"Where did you get that key?" he said sternly.

This was the question Vicente had expected. He stared uneasily at the Americano.

"From you," he said, lifting a guileless brown face. His half-clothed body was slim and very erect.

"What the devil did you do that for? How did you get in?" It was clear the Americano was furious; he looked him up and down but—como no?

"I come when you are in the patio," said Vicente. After all was it not the Delgarda key? Had he not stolen it for his señora? Had he not heard the English señor tell at breakfast how el Señor Ramón had died in China? Had he not heard also that the Americano at the doctor's house had the key? Profanación! That strangers should get it! The key which belonged to his señora. So Vicente stood his ground and faced the Americano.

"But, Señor—it iss *our* key!" he said proudly.

After Vicente had told them, there was silence in the dark corridor where water trickled and fungus growths were on the walls. Vicente saw tears in his señora's eyes; a smile that was simpático curved her lips; she put a white hand on his shoulder.

"You are one veree good boy." She took it;—then they saw the diamond key sparkle in the rusty lock.

So—he had done well—and it was bueno!

When they opened Don Antonio's door, they found a room—small, square, full of the old smell

of centuries. Pilar's candle shone on walls rough and damp. In one corner were piled baskets like those locked in the bedroom of the casa. Vicente knew about them. He watched the Americano and Señor Crewe bend over them. They ripped the tarpaulin and peered inside; then the Americano nodded. On a low shelf were Delgarda treasures—a silver statue of St. Francis, the gold service of the Doña Isabella, and a small silver box—where el Señor Ramón kept the Padre's letter. The señora cried out when she saw the statue and the service. She picked up the silver box and opened it.

"What iss this? Why—it iss an old letter from Padre Mateo." They turned. She read it hurriedly. "He iss the first padre of Santa Maria!" Her face flushed. "It iss about the Doña Isabella! It tells, si, it tells what the key unlocks! The secret of the casa! I read it—si?" Pilar held the candle higher, and the English señor turned his flashlight. Vicente listened, nodding. He had seen that letter.

It was the old story of the casa. It was of an English lord who had made a picture of the Doña Isabella. He had loved her— Ay de mi—*how* he had loved her! Don Antonio had found it out and had killed his esposa in front of the picture. Then the English painter had killed Don Antonio. And the padre of Santa Maria, coming to say vespers in the chapel, had found the don and the doña lying in the sala with the English lord looking down on them. But the Padre Mateo knew how good and pure the doña was—so he had helped to bury her in the patio, blessing the ground. Ába—the Virgin had

not taken Doña Isabella after all! Vicente cast a fearful glance over his shoulder—the English painter had locked up the picture in the sala and given the key and this letter to the padre for the Delgardas. Caramba! That key! To unlock the picture of the beautiful Isabella—Vicente shivered—to unlock also this evil room where Don Antonio hid his women! Que diablo!

Vicente was so absorbed in thinking how long the Doña Isabella had been buried in the patio that, though he heard them all talking like people in a market place, before he knew it they had hurried out, carrying the key and the candle and leaving him alone in the dark. With a shocked cry, he fled after them and in the cloisters he caught up with Pilar, hampered by her long skirts. Thinking of Doña Isabella, the two servants crossed themselves as they scurried through the patio and up the stairs. At the landing Vicente slipped a string of red beads into Pilar's cold hand.

"I buy them from Angelo, si—" he whispered—"before he go home with el Señor Doctor. After the cockfight at San Juan, Angelo hass nothing but red beads—no!"

"How you are good!—Vicente!" Pilar snuggled close as they went up to the balcony.

In the sala Paula had lighted the candles in sconces—in candelabras—in the iron torches—for all electric wires were down. Instantly the ancient casa had stepped back a century or two into the days of the Illustrados. It had taken on another kind of dignity. It was full of mystery—of

flickering lights in branching silver-gilt candlesticks and sconces fastened in carved paneling—mystery of stiff Spanish faces, of dim old portraits staring at each other through the shadows. Mystery of reflected lights on polished floors, on formal Spanish furniture. For a few brief hours the sala had recaptured the splendor of its past.

Vicente stood looking in. His señora was standing in front of a long panel that opened like a door. He could see the flash of the key in the carving. He gave a sharp little hiss and went into the room.

There was the picture of Doña Isabella—tall like a person!

She was dressed in yellow satin, very low in the neck. She had a white mantilla and a comb like his señora wore to the Spanish Club for fiestas. She had blue ribbons tying her white sleeves, and she stood—Dios!—she stood by the same table that was here in the sala. And how she looked like his señora! Vicente's eyes swept the group in front of the picture. The Americano was looking at the painter's name and saying—

"It's worth a fortune!"

The señorita was watching the Doña Isabella like one who sees a vision. But the English señor—! Vicente's face changed! He was very close to the señora and looked down at her as the English painter must have looked at the Doña Isabella. The first doña of the casa had an English lover—and the last doña—Vicente sighed! But after all the Señor Crewe was an Illustrado—como no?

Turning, he went out on the balcony and looked

at the moon shining clear and strong above the Walled City. So—the great storm was over! But steaming out beyond Cavite light a freighter carried two evil men to China. Thinking of it, the Malay heart lightened.

The cicadas were singing in the patio; he could smell the y'lang-y'lang scattered along the passage; the air was warm and sweet. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the Señorita Victory talking to the Americano. Ába—there *would* be love! Vicente smiled—

And—the Key of Delgarda Casa had been brought home from China—

"Gracias á Dios!"

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Key to the casa